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Travelling Back in Times

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Sunshine in a Leprosy Recovery Village

314
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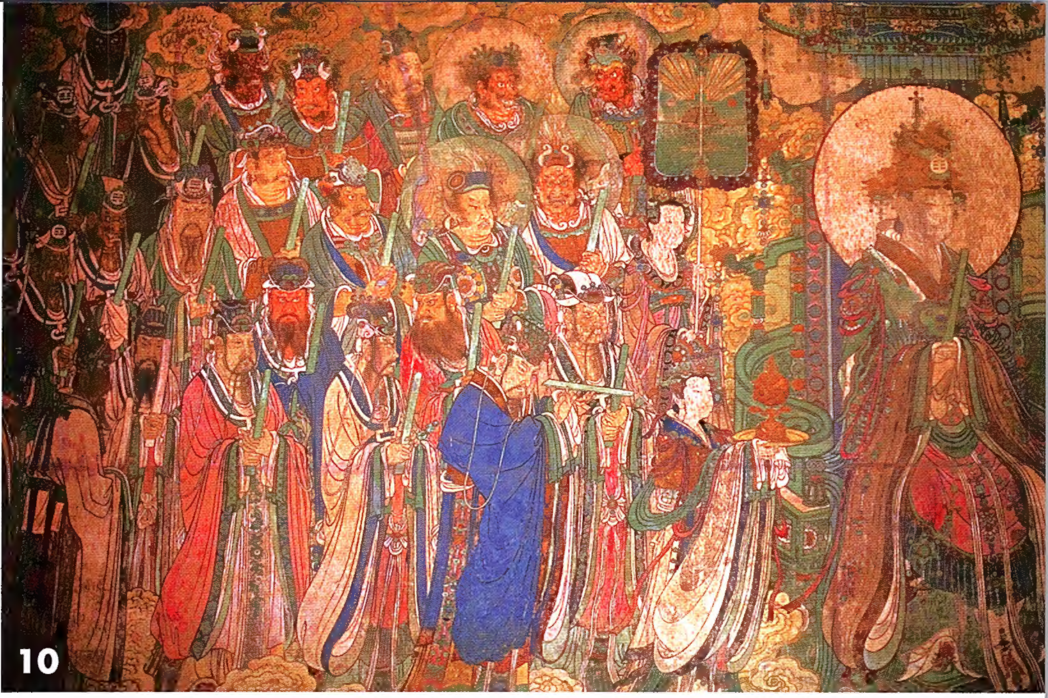

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The Global Village

When I was having youtiao sticks as my breakfast this morning, I couldn't help but think of the trend towards globalisation affecting China Today. Youtiao, or deep-fried dough sticks — a quintessential Chinese food for breakfast, are now served in all KFC chain stores in China. More Chinese food is apparently expected to enrich KFC's breakfast menu in the near future. I was intrigued by this move to localise its menu by such a renowned world enterprise; even foreign travellers can pick up youtiao in familiar places.

Globalisation is nothing new, however. Early forms of globalisation existed during the Han Dynasty (206B.C. — 220A.D.) when the Silk Road trade began. We recommend a fabulous tour to Shanxi Province, a place that combines with China's 5,000-year civilization and the internationalised ancient city of Pingyao. Pingyao is famed for its annual Pingyao International Photography Festival — one of the China's 'Top Ten Influential Festivals'. The ancient city is also known as 'China's Wall Street' by foreign economists, featuring the very first bank in the country's financial history — Rishengchang.

Back to Hong Kong thousands of kilometres away, the once-colonized metropolis will surely amaze you. Luo Tian Da Jiao, a Taoist Mass Worship event colourfully displays fusions of the country's religion. Taoism, in fact, embodies China's religious culture. Even foreign priests from the United States participated in the event, taking this golden opportunity to learn Taoism in Hong Kong — a place already returned to her motherland 10 years ago — developing its own cross-culture.

Pingyao International Photography Festival. (by Huang Yanhong)

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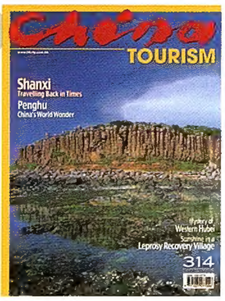
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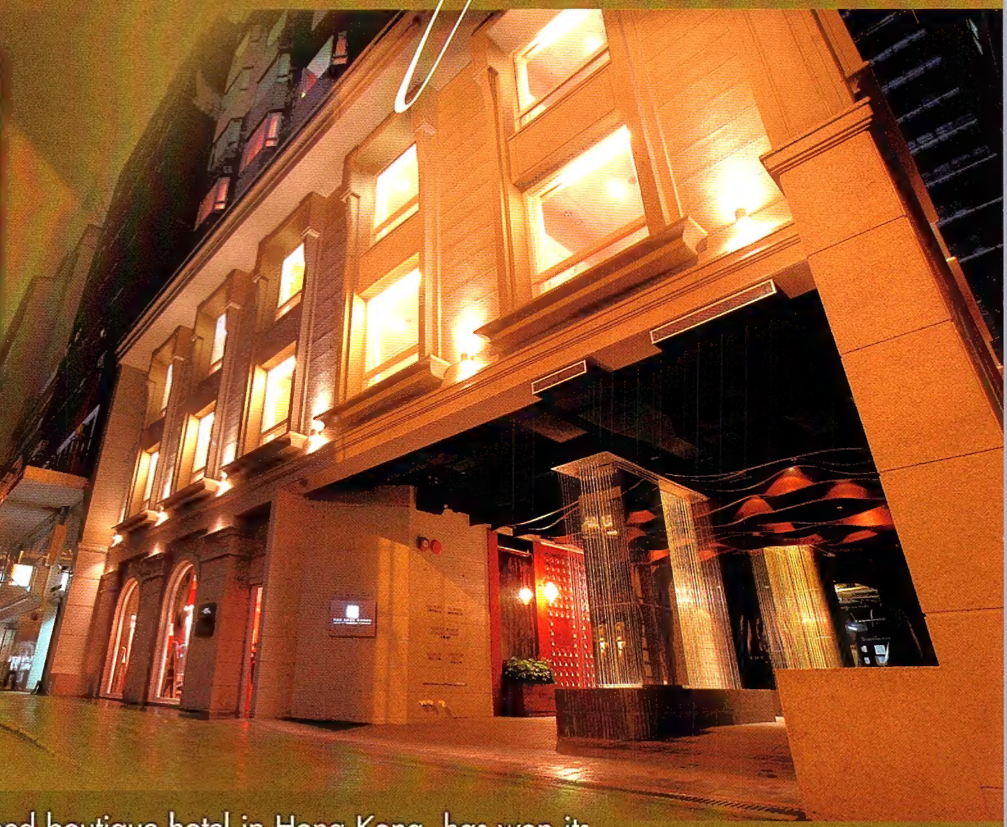
The Luxe Manor
The Ambiance Boutique Hotel



The Luxe Manor, a newly designed boutique hotel in Hong Kong, has won its first accolade, inclusion in Conde Nast Traveller's 'Hot List' in 2007. The surreal concept styled luxury European mansion, is the only boutique hotel in Hong Kong included on the list. The state-of-art hotel will surely provide whatever your heart desires. This is the beginning of a journey to be remembered.

Stepping inside, an eclectic mix of Oriental, post modern and European antiques as diverse as their origin — a celebration of the abstract and unreal — it is so a breathtaking scene. To enrich the path of voyage, guests are offered different themed suites for more discovery. There are 159-room manor with six themes to choose from. Guests can escape into a surreal, yet tranquil room that echoed to the style and ambiance of the hotel lobby. The room is decadent, quirky but at the same time, stylish and comfortable. Like a mirage, behind the mirror is the LCD Flat Panel TV, the multimedia entertainment system is behind the faux fireplace, with many other devices strategically placed. It is like a 21st century illusionist in the playground but that is your room.

With the inside world of the fantastic, the outside is just as exciting. Settled in the heart of Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong's most dynamic Shopping and Business Centre, the Luxe Manor is surrounded by a mecca of shops, markets, department stores and museums. From Temple Street and its diverse range of trinkets; the 'Golden Mile' of Nathan road; the Hong Kong Museum of History; and, to Knutsford Terrace with its assortment of restaurants, bars and clubs — all Hong Kong had to offer is right there on the pulse.

To Start Your Ambiance Journey

Transport: Take the train to Airport Express Kowloon Station and change for free shuttle bus (Route K5). The fare is HK$90. You can also take the bus route A21 at the ground transportation Centre opposite to Car park I in the airport. Alight at the bus stop near the intersection of Kimberley Road and Nathan Road. Bus fare is HK$33.

Address: 39 Kimberley Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Tel.: (852) 3763 8888 Website: www.theluxemanor.com

Jiangsu to Open 40 Air Routes

East China's Jiangsu Province plans to open more than 40 air routes and carry 13 million passengers in 2008, according to the provincial transport bureau sources. 30 of the air routes linked to domestic cities, with the rest overseas. The province will spend 400 million yuan this year in building a new airport in Huai'an City, and in expanding three others, including the Nanjing Lukou International Airport. Jiangsu is one of the most prosperous provinces in the country, and an engine for the economy.

Singaporean Food Court Chain Opens Second Branch in Hong Kong

Megabite Hong Kong Ltd announced the opening of its second food court, Food Republic Citygate, in Tung Chung of Lantau Island. It is composed of 18 food stalls and four mini restaurants. With 770 seats in total, it aims to offer an exceptional experience for diners by providing a wide variety of Southeast Asian cuisine. They already have one food court in Taikoo Shing, Hong Kong.

foodrepublic 大食代

World Carnival plans China's largest indoor park

World Carnival, the world's largest touring carnival entertainer based in UK, plans to build China's largest indoor amusement park in Inner Mongolia's Manchuri, the northernmost city in China, bordering Russia. The company believed that Manchuri, boasting a special geography and a 7-month-long heating season, is consistent with their indoor amusement park strategy and is a favorite candidate. The upcoming park will cover over 2.1 square kilometres, integrating local culture, amusement park, tourism and shopping as well as Russian folk culture. It is expected to boost the local real estate industry and economic development.

Beijing Eunuch Culture Museum to be Reopen

Chinese history has witnessed a group of sexually impotent males who were forced to act as royal servants for their entire lives. These men were deprived of the right to marry and have descendants. They are known as 'eunuchs'. The Eunuch Culture Museum, now under renovation, is scheduled to reopen in July this year just a month before the start of the Olympic Games in the Chinese capital. The museum is located in the premises of the tomb of Tian Yi, a famous eunuch of the Ming dynasty, is the best preserved eunuch mausoleum in China.

KFC begins serving 'youtiao' in China

Youtiao, or deep-fried dough sticks, are appearing in American fast-food chain KFC in all of its restaurants in China, making another step on its road of localizing its menu. KFC claims its youtiao contains no alum, which is widely used by Chinese youtiao makers to keep the food fluffy and crisp, and which has sparked health worries. Each youtiao stick sells at three yuan (40 US cents), nearly three times as its price in ordinary Chinese restaurants. More Chinese food is expected to enrich KFC's breakfast menu in the near future.

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Shanghai Old Plant Tower Becomes New Attraction

The spectacular renovation of a chimney in Shanghai's century-old power plant will make it one of the attractions of World Expo 2010. The 165-metre chimney on the Puxi side of the Expo site along the Huangpu River in the 110-year-old Nanshi Power Plant will be transformed into a 201-metre 'Expo Harmony Tower'. Tracks and cars similar to a roller-coaster will wrap around the tower and take visitors to the top for a bird's-eye view of Shanghai's skyline and the 5.28-square-kilometre Expo site. The old workshops in the power plant that closed last year will also be revamped into one of the five Expo theme pavilions and will host the 'Exploration of Future Cities' exhibition. After Expo the venues will become museums.

Flights from US to India Through China

India and China have resolved to look for ways to improve bilateral air connectivity. Private airlines Jet Airways had begun its flights to the West Coast of US via China. Daily flights fly between Mumbai and San Francisco via China starting on March. This is the first time that a foreign airline is allowed to operate such services through China, further strengthening bilateral ties between India and China. This also provided services for picking up passengers from China en route to San Francisco.

Jiangxi Opens First Direct Coach Service to Macau

Jiangxi Province has launched its first direct coach service to Macau since the beginning of this year, two months after it opened such a coach line to Hong Kong. The direct coach line is operated between Ganzhou in southern Jiangxi and Macau.

A deluxe bus departs from the Ganzhou Coach Terminal at 8:35 am every day, and it takes passengers about 8 hours to reach Macau. The fare is 195 yuan for the 669-km journey. Passengers are then transferred to another coach at the Gongbei Customs in Zhuhai of Guangdong Province before arriving at their destination, the Bank of China Tower in Macau.

Qatar Airways to Launch Flights to Guangzhou

Qatar Airways announced plans to serve the southern Chinese industrial port city of Guangzhou from March 31 to further cement its position in one of the world's fastest growing economies. It will operate four flights-a-week non-stop. The addition of Guangzhou strengthens Qatar Airways' China network, where it already flies to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong with a total of 16 flights a week. Guangzhou takes the airline's capacity into China up to 20 flights a week. Passengers flying Qatar Airways from Europe, Middle East and Africa will have excellent connections to Guangzhou via the airline's operational hub of Doha, capital of the State of Qatar.

New Buddhist College to Build in 10 Years

Shaolin Temple, the birthplace of Chinese martial arts, plans to spend 300 million yuan (US$41.1 million) on a new temple which will become home to the nation's biggest Buddhist college. The new temple, on the site of the Donglin Temple in Xingyang County, Henan Province is expected to take 10 years to build. Donglin used to be a temple for royal families in the Ming Dynasty (1368—1644). The new temple will offer courses in literature, philosophy, logic, English and computing, and traditional Chinese culture such as calligraphy and Chinese medicine. Most teachers will be monks, and the courses will be taught in three schools of Buddhism tailored for students from China's mainland and southeastern Asian countries.

Indo China Explorer Cruise Boarding

Royal Caribbean International's Asia line, Rhapsody of the Seas, is departing from the port of Hong Kong to Vietnam starting this year for the first time using Hong Kong as based port. This Indo China Tour will go from Hong Kong to Vietnam and finally back to Hong Kong. Price ranges from US$499 to US$1,349. This is the first time Royal Caribbean has chosen Hong Kong as the main port, and for long! The ship will provide up to 12 cruise tours based in Hong Kong this year.

UK Offers New Visa to Chinese

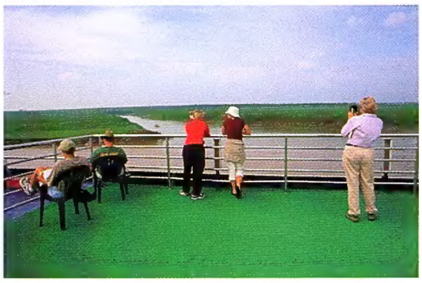
Chinese people can now apply for a new kind of UK visa which entitles them to take unlimited short trips to Britain over a period of two to five years, announced the British Embassy in Beijing. The long-term premium UK visa costs 3,100 yuan and holders only have to give their fingerprints once. The visa has been created to meet the needs of travellers who wish to visit the UK on a regular basis for business or pleasure.

Days Inn's Debut in Changbai Mount

The US hotel chain Days Inn is the first international hotel brand to debut in the Changbai Mountains in northeast China's Jilin Province this year. By renovating a hotel in Chixi District of the nature reserve for 120 million yuan, the Days Inn hotel offers 122 European-style rooms. It has been in operation since January.

Shanghai Hotel Goes Green

URBN Hotels & Resorts Shanghai, the first of 20 design-centric, carbon-neutral properties to be developed in China over the next five years, is a former factory warehouse that has been converted into a modern 26-room hotel with Shanghainese touches. Amenities include in-room acupuncture, flat-screen TVs and 24-hour room service. The management says it will track all energy consumed by the hotel — including staff commutes, food and beverage delivery and guests' usage — to calculate a carbon footprint. It will then neutralize the footprint by buying investment credits in emission reduction projects throughout China.



Hubei

Visitors Attracted to Three Gorges Dam

China's Three Gorges Dam attracted a record high of 1.25 million tourist arrivals last year, a year-on-year increase of six percent. The dam area will see more tourists this year thanks to the basic completion of the Three Gorges Project within the year and the Olympic Games in August. The approved Three Gorges Airport also helped, making it possible for foreign tourists to fly directly to Yichang, Hubei Province where the dam is located, on international or region lines.

China

Tourism Revenue Reached 1.09 Trillion Yuan

China's tourism revenue reached 1.09 trillion yuan (US$137.92 billion) in 2007, the first time it broke the one trillion yuan mark, according to China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) statistics. The Board announced that in the year of 2007, inbound travellers have reached 132 million, increased 5.5 percent compared with the previous year, of whom more than 54 million people stayed overnight, increased 9.6 percent. Such expansion in the tourism industry has created 500,000 job opportunities last year.

Liaoning

Dalian Offshore National Geological Park Opened

The park is located at Jinshi Beach in Dailin, a beautiful coastal city of Liaoning Province. The park was chosen to be opened on the day of the 15th anniversary of the establishment of Jinshi Beach, which is one of the most beautiful seaside scene on the shore of northeast China. The park has an area of 216.42 square kilometers, and a total of 60 million yuan was invested on this park. Meanwhile, Dalian Jinshi Geological Museum kicked off as well.

Anhui

Linjiang Bridge Open to Traffic

At the infall of the Qingyi River and Yangtse River, Linjiang Bridge with 73.5-metre-high fish-shaped main tower was completed and open to traffic in Wuhu City, east China's Anhui Province this year. It does not only improve traffic but serves as a great sight for both residents and tourists.

Tibet

Invest in Toilet Renovations at Tourist Attractions

China tourism authorities plan to allocate 10 million yuan to renovate toilets in popular attractions in the Tibet Autonomous Region. This shows determination and sincerity in developing further the region's tourism. The spectacular natural sceneries and unique cultural attractions of the autonomous region have lured an ever-increasing number of tourists, both domestic and foreign. Tibet expects to receive 4.02 million tourists this year, a year-on-year increase of 64 percent. Every year, 80 foreign language speaking tour guides who have graduated from Zhejiang University and Sichuan University come to Tibet and work as tour guides.

Yunnan

Lao Airlines Launches Route to Chinese City

Lao Airlines, from Vietnam, opened a new route between the World Heritage town of Luang Prabang and Kunming, capital city of China's Yunnan Province to meet the need of growing tourism in the region. In 2007, Luang Prabang Province, home to the World Heritage site, welcomed 320,000 visitors, including 195,175 foreigners, and generated tourism revenues of about 80 million U.S. dollars. Now, Lao Airlines operates four flights a week between Vientiane capital and Kunming.

Shanghai

Shanghai Under Speculation for Building Disneyland

Reports have been out claiming the site for the Disneyland theme park might be switched from Chuansha to Chongming, an island in the Yangtze river to the north of the city that is being developed as an ecotourism district. The park would be built after 2010, when the city is due to host the World Expo. Chongming, first settled for farming during the Cultural Revolution, is slated for development as a non-industrial region. A Disney park would provide employment on the jobs scarce island, which has long relied on work schemes that put residents to work driving taxis in the city.

Shanghai

Another Tallest Hotel in Shanghai City

The Park Hyatt in Shanghai will become the world's tallest hotel once it is built next July as part of the World Financial Center — now the tallest building on the mainland.

The hotel, covering the 79th to 93rd floor, will have 174 rooms and suites, each offering views of the Huangpu River. The Grand Hyatt Shanghai on the 88-storey Jin Mao Tower is currently the world's tallest hotel.

Chongqing

GreenTree Inn Plans 10 New Hotels in Chongqing

GreenTree Inn Hotel Management Group plans to build ten new budget hotels in Chongqing this year — and up to 50 hotels over the next five years. As part of these plans, the hotel chain signed a lease contract with Chongqing Municipal Party School last month. The school will provide a 5,174-square-metre building, which GreenTree will use to create a 100-room hotel. The building is in the Yubei Hi-Tech Development Zone. This is part of the chain's plans for southwest China in particular — and inland China in general.

China

Dubai's Luxury Hotel Group Plans 10 Hotels in China

The Dubai-based luxury hotel group Jumeirah is planning to have at least 10 hotels in China in the next three years. Jumeirah's development plans in China are part of its expansion strategy in Asia to create a geographically balanced portfolio. The group currently manages 10 hotels in Dubai, London and New York. As they try to develop the market in Asia, they have decided to place two-thirds of their 16 hotels in Asia and in China.

Zhejiang

Low-cost Flight Begins Flying from Kuala Lumpur to Hangzhou

Since February, AirAsiaX, Malaysia's first low-cost, long-haul airline has begun flying to Hangzhou in China. Early birds set off to the destination that is situated 180 km outside of Shanghai from 99.99 yuan one way from Kuala Lumpur (excluding airport taxes, surcharges and fees).

Zhejiang

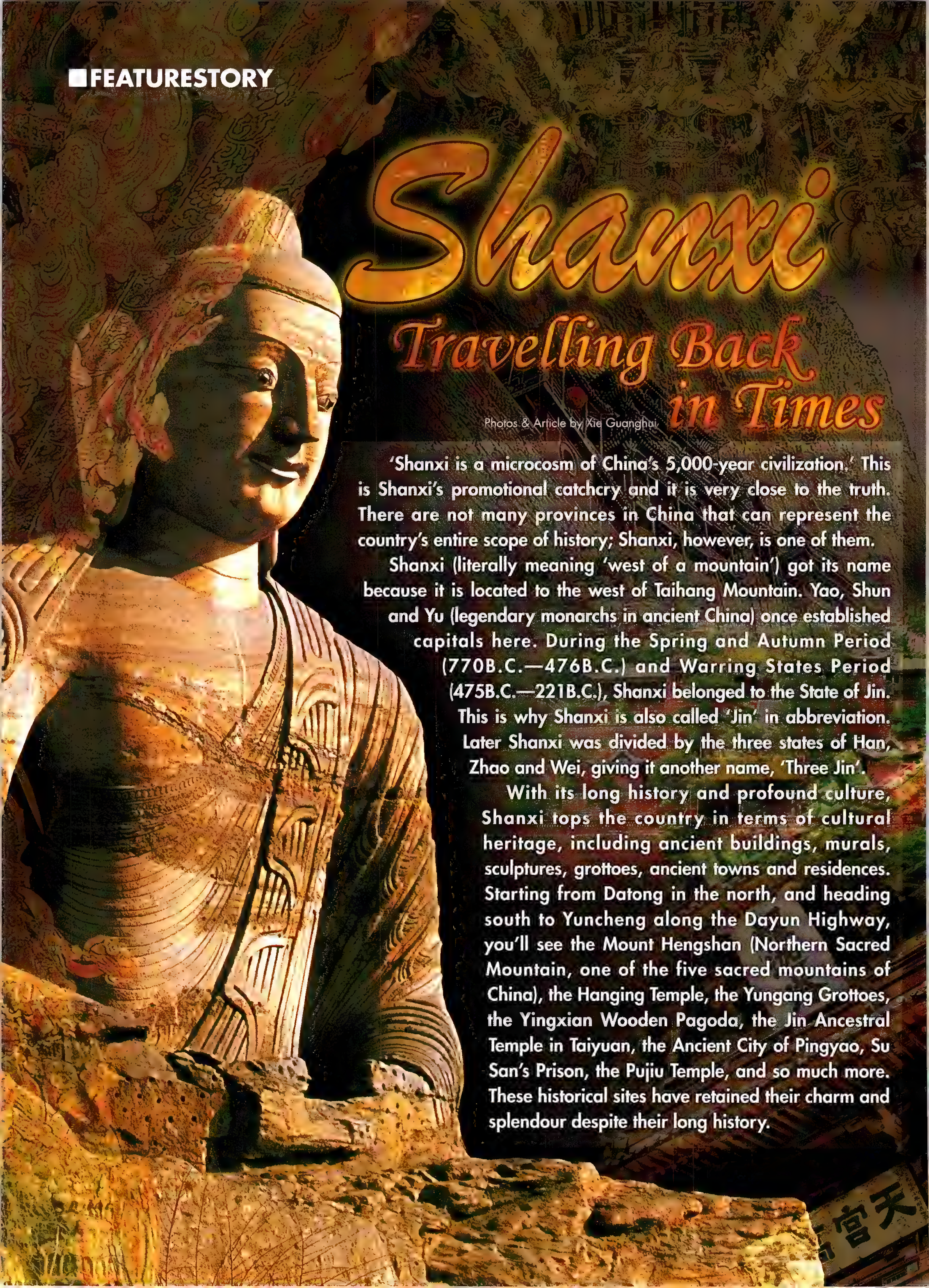
Dinosaur Bones Prepared for Display

The Dongyang Municipal Museum in Zhejiang Province is restoring the fossils of a dinosaur that lived 65 million years ago. It will be shown to the public in June. While planting buckwheat near a hill on last September, a resident of the city noticed a long, large bone that experts from the Zhejiang Provincial Museum soon identified as that of a dinosaur. After more than 20 days of digging, workers unearthed the remains of an entire dinosaur, which they then took to the museum.

Beijing

Home-stay Inns to Earn Multiples During Olympics

At present, an ordinary home-stay inn with one bedroom located in the downtown Beijing area usually costs around 1,500~2,000 yuan per month. During the Games, many of these vacant rooms will be rented out, and some may charge as much as 1,000 yuan per night. It means that, in less than one month during the Olympic period, the room can make money equal to a year's rental fee. There are currently five home-stay agencies online accepting Olympic room reservations now.



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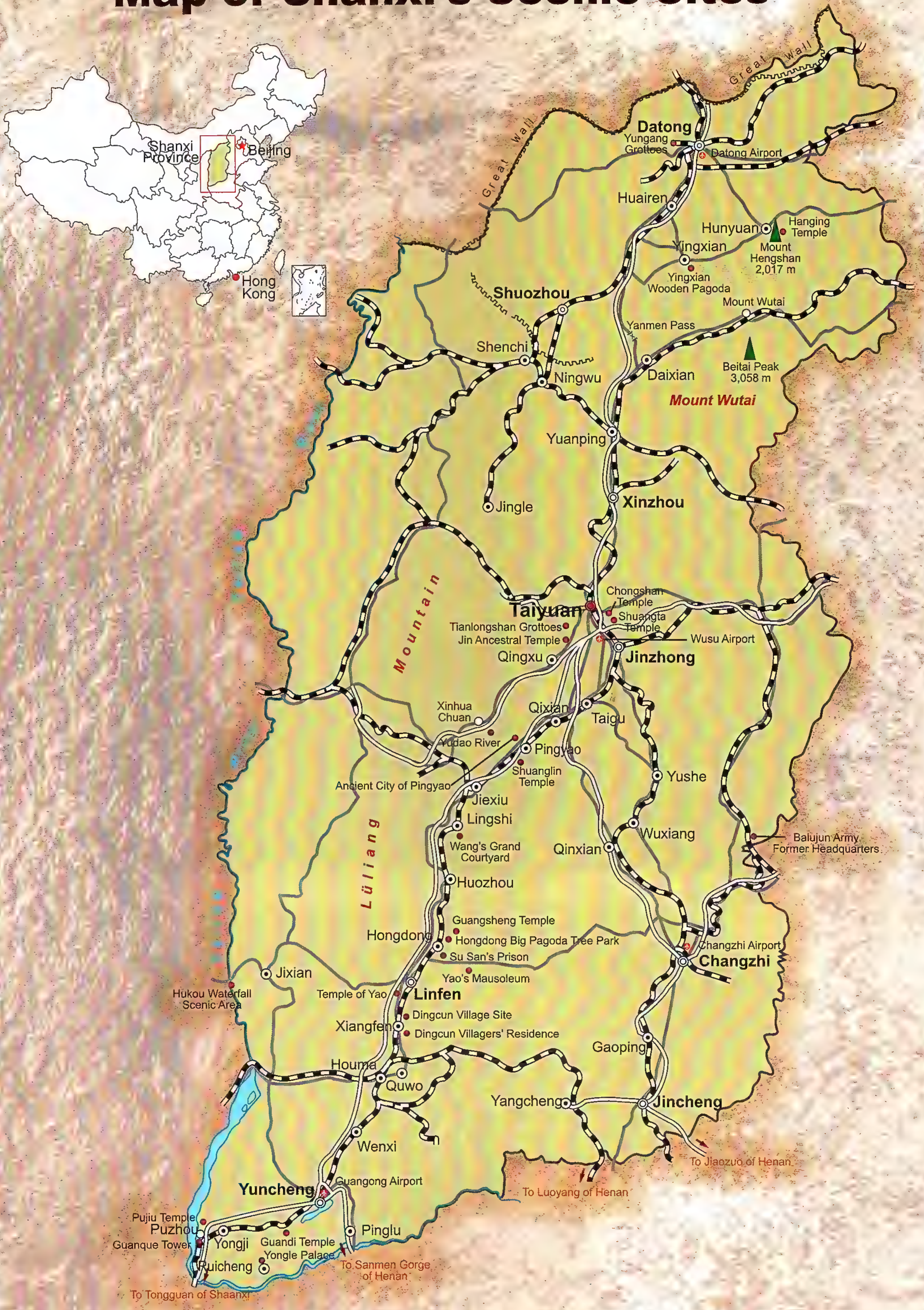
Photos & Article by Xie Guanghui

'Shanxi is a microcosm of China's 5,000-year civilization.' This is Shanxi's promotional catchcry and it is very close to the truth. There are not many provinces in China that can represent the country's entire scope of history; Shanxi, however, is one of them.

Shanxi (literally meaning 'west of a mountain') got its name because it is located to the west of Taihang Mountain. Yao, Shun and Yu (legendary monarchs in ancient China) once established capitals here. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770B.C.—476B.C.) and Warring States Period (475B.C.—221B.C.), Shanxi belonged to the State of Jin. This is why Shanxi is also called 'Jin' in abbreviation. Later Shanxi was divided by the three states of Han, Zhao and Wei, giving it another name, 'Three Jin'.

With its long history and profound culture, Shanxi tops the country in terms of cultural heritage, including ancient buildings, murals, sculptures, grottoes, ancient towns and residences. Starting from Datong in the north, and heading south to Yuncheng along the Dayun Highway, you'll see the Mount Hengshan (Northern Sacred Mountain, one of the five sacred mountains of China), the Hanging Temple, the Yungang Grottoes, the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, the Jin Ancestral Temple in Taiyuan, the Ancient City of Pingyao, Su San's Prison, the Pujiu Temple, and so much more. These historical sites have retained their charm and splendour despite their long history.

Map of Shanxi's Scenic Sites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Shenchi
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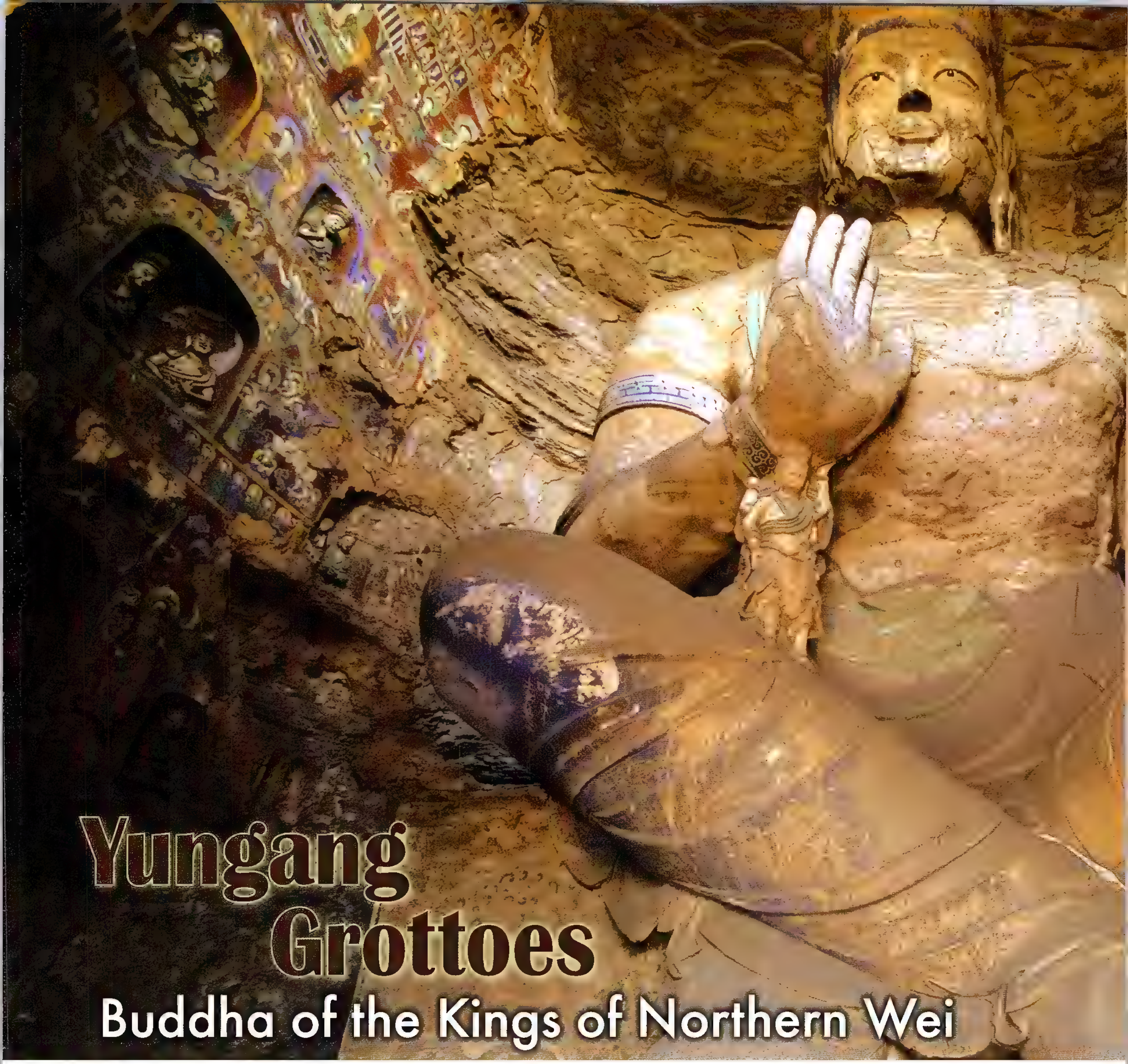
Ruicheng
To Sanmen Gorge of Henan
To Tongguan of Shaanxi



Yungang Grottoes

Buddha of the Kings of Northern Wei

1. The cross-legged Maitreya Buddha in Cave No. 13 is 13 m tall, the seventh tallest of all the Buddha statues in the Yungang Grottoes.

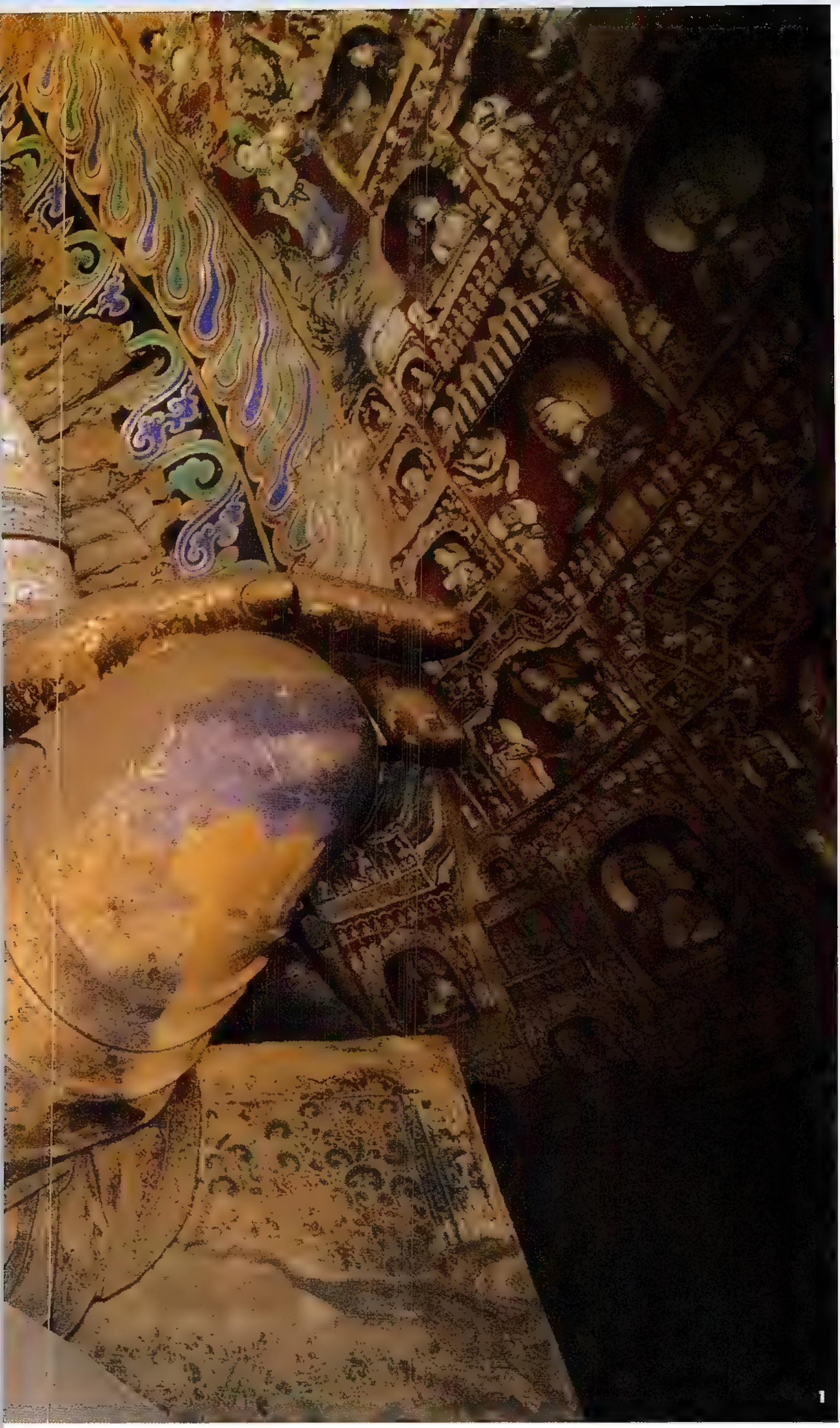
2. The main Buddha statue in the north shrine of Cave No. 20. With a height of 13.5 m, it wears a simper, representing a bright culture and history of the nation.

The Yungang Grottoes in Datong, Shanxi Province, along with the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu Province and the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan Province, are renowned as China's three major cave clusters.

The Yungang Grottoes were created in 460, nearly 100 years later than the Mogao Grottoes and more than 40 years earlier than the Longmen Grottoes. These three sites stand along the route that Buddhism took when it expanded through China in its early period. They also represent the three peaks of Buddhism's development in China's early period. The Yungang Grottoes have three main features: they are grand in size; the caves have been kept in a unified artistic style as they were all completed during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 — 534); and the major Buddha statues in the caves are in the likeness of ancient monarchs. These statues embodying both humans and gods are testament to victories of the Tuoba Xianbei tribe (an ancient nationality inhabiting areas in present-day northeast China and Inner Mongolia).

In the Han Dynasty (206B.C. — 220A.D.), there were two very active nationalities in northern China: Xiongnu and Xianbei. In 386, the Xianbei leader, Tuoba established the kingdom of Northern Wei and Datong served as its capital over 50 years. The Yungang Grottoes were created during this time.

Buddhism was introduced into China during the Han Dynasty and was gradually localised. The Xianbei people, who came from grasslands, were open to any new thought, culture or religion.



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Most notably, when the emperors of the Northern Wei Dynasty supported Buddhism, this religion developed by leaps and bounds. In 460, Emperor Wencheng (who reigned from 452 to 465) accepted the eminent monk Tan Yao's suggestion of starting the project of the Yungang Grottoes. The scheme used up the entire national treasury and involved tens of thousands of craftsmen. In the first five years of the project, five caves were completed, the famous 'Five Caves of Tan Yao' of the present-day Yungang Grottoes.

Grottoes Completed in Three Stages

The Yungang Grottoes were carved out of the hills. Ranging over 1,000 m, they were completed in three stages. The first stage (460 — 465) saw the completion of the Five Caves (No. 16~20 caves) in the charge of the monk, Tan Yao. The Buddha statues are huge and simplistic, with serene yet majestic demeanour. The second stage (470 — 494) marked the heyday of the Grottoes, with the largest number and variety of statues. There are five main groups of caves, among which four are double caves (No. 1&2, No. 5&6, No. 7&8, No. 9&10) and one is a triple cave (No. 11~13). The caves are mostly square, separated into front and rear chambers. Some have two levels divided into left and right parts. The third stage (494 — 524), when the Northern Wei Dynasty moved its capital to Luoyang, Henan, witnessed the completion of the Grottoes. The caves dug during this stage are concentrated to the west of Cave No. 20, including No. 4, 14 & 15, as well as some small ones in the west cliff-face.

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As soon as you enter the gate of the Yungang Grottoes, you'll see two four-storey wooden buildings built against a hill. Inside them are Caves No. 5 & 6. Cave No. 5 is oblong, with a vaulted top. It houses a 17-m statue of sitting *Sakyamuni* (the founder of Buddhism) made by Emperor Xiaowen (467 — 499) to commemorate his father Emperor Xianwen (454 — 476). Emperor Xiaowen's grandfather was Emperor Wencheng who gave the edict to create the Yungang Grottoes. Cave No. 6 was dug by Emperor Xiaowen to bring blessings to his grandmother. It is square, with a flat ceiling. At its centre stands a 15-m tower-like column with two levels, the upper level being 6 m and the lower 9 m. There are shrines on each side of the tower-like column. The south shrine is graced with the statue of Emperor Xiaowen's grandmother — Empress Dowager Wenming. She wears a kind and caring expression. Cave No. 6 features the complete stories of Buddhism. The delicate, vivid carvings unveil themselves to visitors like a storybook. They are representative of Buddhist grotto artworks.

Heading west you'll see the No. 7 & 8 double caves which are separated by a huge stone wall. These two carry the story of Emperor Xiaowen's youth and his political life. The statues are huge, symmetrical and successfully depict the life and religious cultivation of monks in northern China. On each side of the window on the back chamber in Cave No. 7 there are carvings of lush trees on which hang a food bag and a water bottle. Under each tree there is a monk wearing a long robe, with only his feet and weather-beaten face exposed. These carvings record the daily religious life of the monks in the north of the Great Wall in the early Northern Wei Dynasty, and are very precious.

No. 7 & 8 double caves have the same design and theme. The caisson ceiling of each cave is divided into six blocks. In the centre of the ceiling is a carving of a huge lotus blossom surrounded by four pairs of Flying *Apsaras* (a kind of nymph or fairy). This type of caisson ceiling has been commonly seen in wooden buildings ever since the Han and Wei dynasties and are typical of the artistic carvings in the Yungang Grottoes. There are still some differences between the two caves. In the north shrine in Cave No. 7 is a statue of *Bodhisattva* wearing a headdress and with crossed legs while Cave No. 8 is a rarely seen statue of

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1. The south wall of Cave No. 9. (by Zhang Haiyan)

2. The main Buddha in the rear chamber of Cave No. 5. The distance between its knees is 15 m and the middle finger of its right hand is 2.3 m long. It is the tallest statue in Yungang Grottoes.

3. The tower-like column in Cave No. 11 has a Buddha on each side. This signifies that there is Buddha in all four directions or Buddha is everywhere.

Shiva with his hair tied in a bun.

The five caves numbered from 9 to 13 are called the Wuhua Caves. No. 9 &10 also happen to be double caves. The caves numbered from 11 to 13 are connected, but they are very different from each other. Cave No. 11 has a tower-like column in the centre; Cave No. 12 has two chambers; and Cave No. 13 is the cave of the big Buddha with a giant figurine supporting its right arm. However, the central tower-like column in Cave No. 11 is no match for that of Cave No. 6 in terms of design and artistic value, plus, repair work can be seen on the lower part of the column. Apart from the enshrined Buddha statue, the other statues in Cave No. 12 are of dancers and musicians holding musical instruments in their hands. This cave portrays the social life and customs of that time and has great historical value. Cave No. 13 is 13.5 m high; unfortunately, most of its coloured paint and the outer layer of clay have fallen off because of severe erosion.

Statues of the Five Emperors

The caves numbered 16 to 20 are the famous Five Caves of Tan Yao. Each of them has one huge Buddha statue, representing the Five emperors of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The one in Cave No. 16 is 13.5 m tall. It is a young and handsome image of Buddha standing on a lotus base with bare feet. Cave No.17's Buddha is 15.6 m tall. The one in Cave No. 18 is 15.5 m and that of Cave No. 19 is 16.8 m tall. Cave No. 20 is the furthest west of the Five Caves of Tan Yao, with a 13.5-m-tall Buddha sitting in lotus posture. This Buddha statue is very delicately carved to commemorate Emperor Daowu who founded the Northern Wei Dynasty.

Admission: Yungang Grottoes: 60 yuan (The Yungang Grottoes are located 16 km west of Datong City proper. You can take Bus No. 3 or take a taxi for 25 yuan.)
Nine-dragon Wall in Datong: 10 yuan (Take Bus No. 4, 17 or 23 in Datong downtown)

Accommodation: Jiahe Business Hotel, Datong
Address: No. 116 Yingbin Road Tel.: (0352) 519 2595
Double-occupancy Room: 168 yuan / night

Mt.Hengshan

Where the Immortals' Dwell

It is said that 4,000 years ago, Emperor Shun (a legendary monarch) went on an inspection tour. When he came to Mount Hengshan, he found that the mountain was very precipitous, so he granted it the honourable title, 'Sacred Northern Mountain'. However, when the 'five sacred mountain' system was established in the Han Dynasty (206B.C. — 220A.D.), Damao Mountain in Quyang of Hebei Province was dubbed the Sacred Northern Mountain. Not until the Ming Dynasty (1368 — 1644) was it changed back to Mount Hengshan, and so has it remained ever since.

Mount Hengshan is well-know as a Taoist mountain. During the Northern Wei Dynasty, Tuoba Shou (Emperor Taiwu) was a fervent Taoist, Taoism was therefore greatly developed. Taoism prevailed in the Tang Dynasty (618 — 907) during which time Taoist temples were built all over the Mountain. It is said Zhang Guolao, one of the China's eight immortals, once lived here as a hermit while he cultivated his religious way. In the Ming Dynasty, Taoism was elevated to a higher position as Mount Hengshan became the Sacred Northern Mountain. Most of the buildings on the mountain, which attract worshippers all year round, date back to the Ming Dynasty.

Chartered Cars, the Only Transportation

It took me more than one hour to get to Hunyuan from Datong. When I arrived at Hunyuan, Mount Hengshan appeared in front of me, picturesque and grandiose.

On one side of the parking lot was the Zhenwu Temple, which said to be the site of sacrificial ceremonies held on the Sacred Northern Mountain. Unfortunately, only one broken tablet remains.

1. The sacred ground of the God of Zhenwu (Genuine Might) on Mount Hengshan, the Sacred Northern Mountain.

2. Taoists and worshippers in the Temple of the Sacred Northern Mountain.

3. The Temple of the Sacred Northern Mountain, located at the foot of the cliff to the south of Tianfeng Peak, is the most majestic temple complex on Mount Hengshan.

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The inscriptions on the left half of the tablet can hardly be seen. The original Zhenwu Temple was destroyed during the chaotic 10-year Cultural Revolution (1966 — 1976). The new one, which was built poorly, is not worth mentioning. Then I followed the zigzagging mountain road up to the top. A little bit further up was Guolao Hill. The path here had many small holes which were said to be the hoof prints left by Zhang Guolao's donkey.

After I left Sheshen Cliff, I climbed stone steps and headed north for about 600 to 700 m. Then I came to Feishi Cave which had a big niche on the cliff. At the bottom of the east cliff there is the Sleeping Palace and at the bottom of the south cliff is the Shuzhuang Tower. The Sleeping Palace was originally the main hall of all the buildings on the Sacred Northern Mountain. It is said that it was built during the reign of Emperor Taiwu (408 — 452) of the Northern Wei Dynasty and had been renovated by each dynasty ever since. The present structure is from the Ming Dynasty and enshrines the Great God of the Sacred Northern Mountain. Further up from the Sleeping Palace is Jieguan Pavilion, which is actually a courtyard house used to accommodate the ancient officials when they climbed the mountain.

Having entered the mountain gate, I had to climb 103 stone steps at about a 40° angle. As they were so steep, I had to bend my body over and even use my hands sometimes. I looked around half way up the steps and could see only the heads of the people behind me and feet of the ones ahead.

3

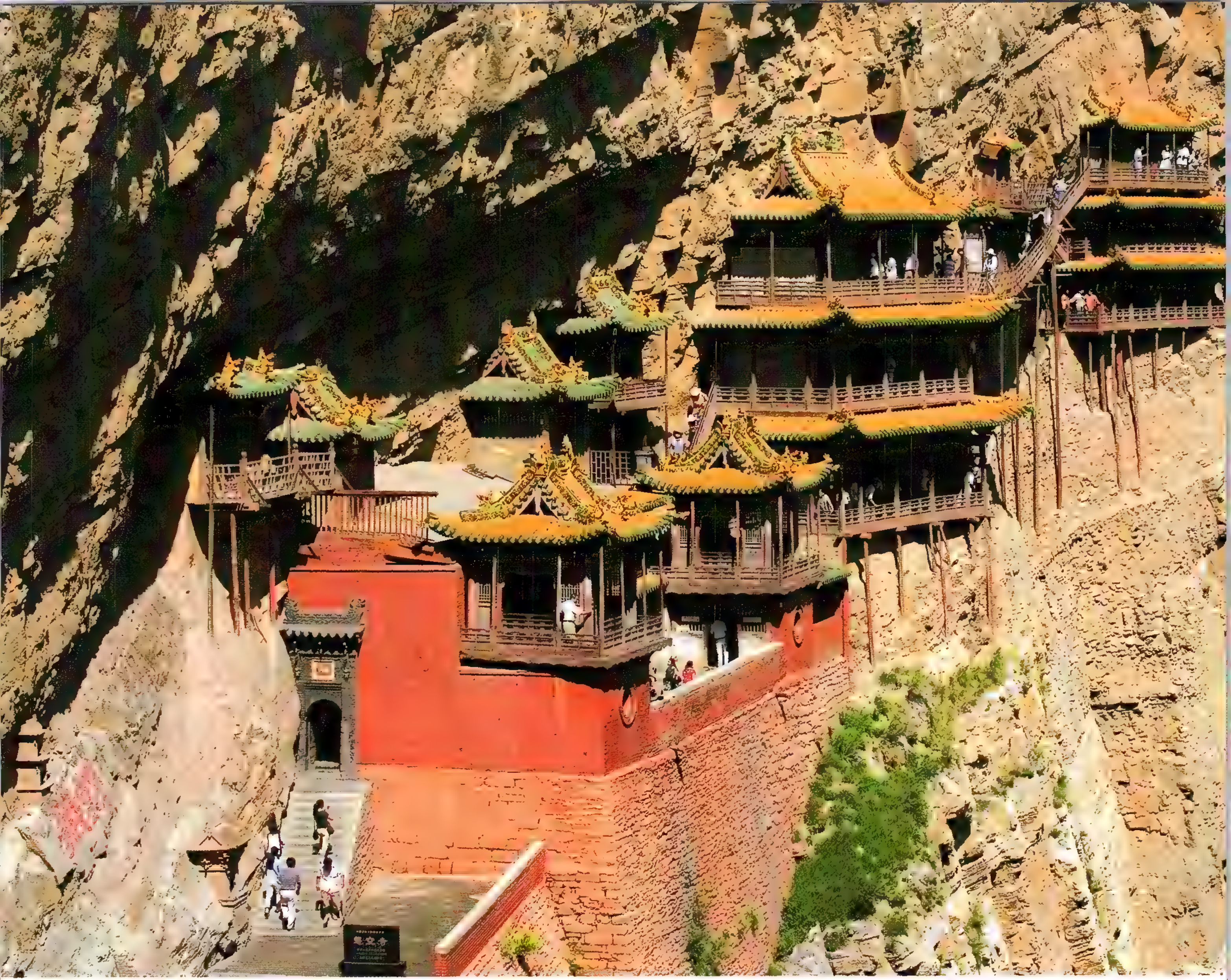
Admission: 25 yuan

Cable car: 30 yuan uphill, 30 yuan downhill and 55 yuan for a round trip.

The Highest among the Five Sacred Mountains

Hengzong Hall on the mountain enshrines a statue of the Great God of the Sacred Northern Mountain. To the northwest of the hall is Huixian Cliff with a large indentation where the Huixian Chamber is located. Standing here, you get a great view of Mount Hengshan. Further up is the main peak — Xuanwu Peak reaching an altitude of 2,017 m, which is about 500 m higher than the top of Mount Tai. Mount Hengshan is the highest among the five sacred mountains (the other four are Mount Tai of the Sacred East Mountain, Hengshan Mountain of the Sacred South Mountain, Mount Hua of the Sacred West Mountain and Mount Song of the Sacred Central Mountain).

The annual temple fair is held on the seventh and eighth days of the fourth lunar month. Mount Hengshan is always the busiest spot during the fair. Worshippers and tourists come to pray or join the Taoist ceremonies by musical scripture troupe.



Hanging Temple

Architectural Wonder

Coming down from the Mountain, I passed by the Jinlong (Golden Dragon) Valley by taxi. I stood on the winding mountain highway and looked westward, and saw the Hanging Temple hanging on the precipitous cliff like a mirage in clouds.

The Acrophobes' Knees Might Shake

The Hanging Temple got its name because of its special characteristics. It is a religious site for Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Built in the late Northern Wei Dynasty in 491, the temple has been renovated many times. The remaining buildings hail from the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The entire temple is supported by wooden beams inserted into the cliff. The wooden beams, columns and the inclined braces form a very stable structure. After several hundred years, it remains in perfect shape, which is truly amazing.

I crossed a small bridge and climbed a plank road along the cliff, then came to the mountain gate of the temple, which structure is very complicated. After passing through a dooryard, I walked upstairs and entered a niche corridor. The first hall I saw was the Hall of the Heavenly King, inside of which was a statue of a big-bellied, smiling *Maitreya*. A two-storey square temple building appeared afterwards. Downstairs were rooms for monks to eat, live and recite scriptures. Upstairs were the Three Buddhas Hall, the Taiyi (God of the North Pole) Hall and the Hall of Lord Guan. Inside the Three Buddhas Hall were the clay sculpture of the Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future and the iron statue of *Skanda* (a deity that is popular amongst practicing Hindus and

1. The Hanging Temple hangs on the west cliff of the Jinlong Valley like a mirage.

2. The Chunyang Hall which enshrines Lü Dongbin, one of the eight immortals, is designed in a northern Chinese home style. This makes people feel much closer to the gods.

3. The Hanging Temple hangs above a deep valley. When walking in it, visitors get a thrill.

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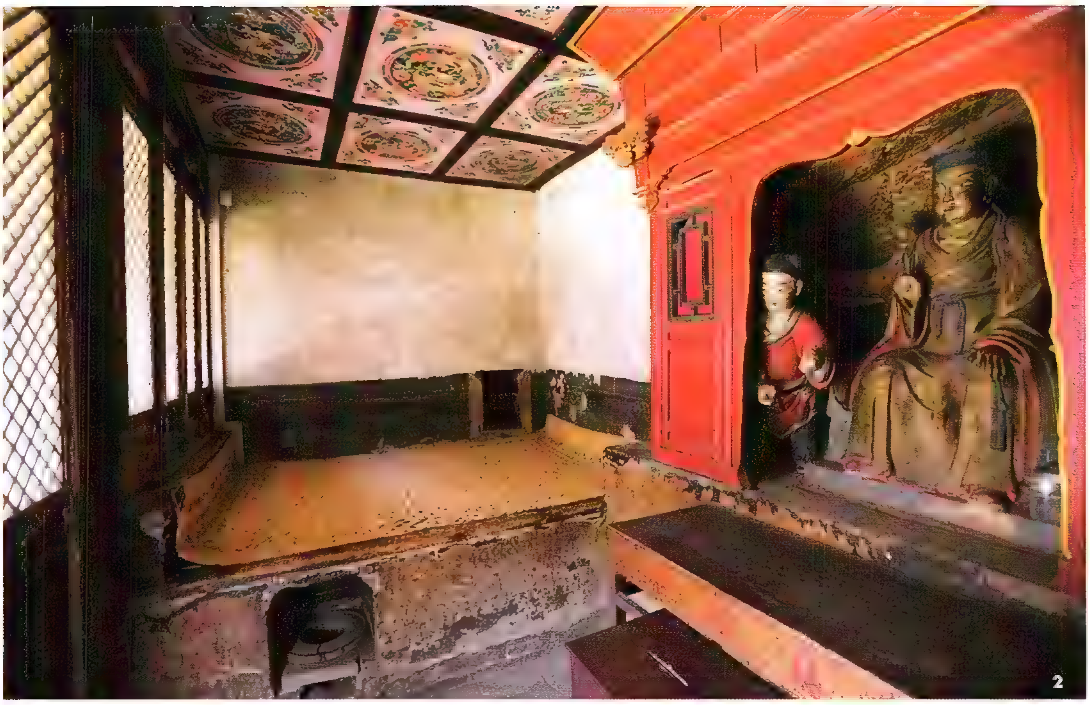
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Buddhists) of the Ming Dynasty. Both of these are very valuable sculptures.

To the north are two three-storey nine-ridge towers. They are supported by thin wooden poles. This is the most dangerous part of the Hanging Temple. Even so, walking in the temple feels like walking on air. This is an exciting feeling that you'll never be able to experience anywhere else.

Melting Pot of Three Churches

The Hanging Temple consists of 17 halls of varying size, among which 11 are Buddhist halls, five Taoist and one combining three religions. It enshrines over 80 statues of deities and Buddhas.

3

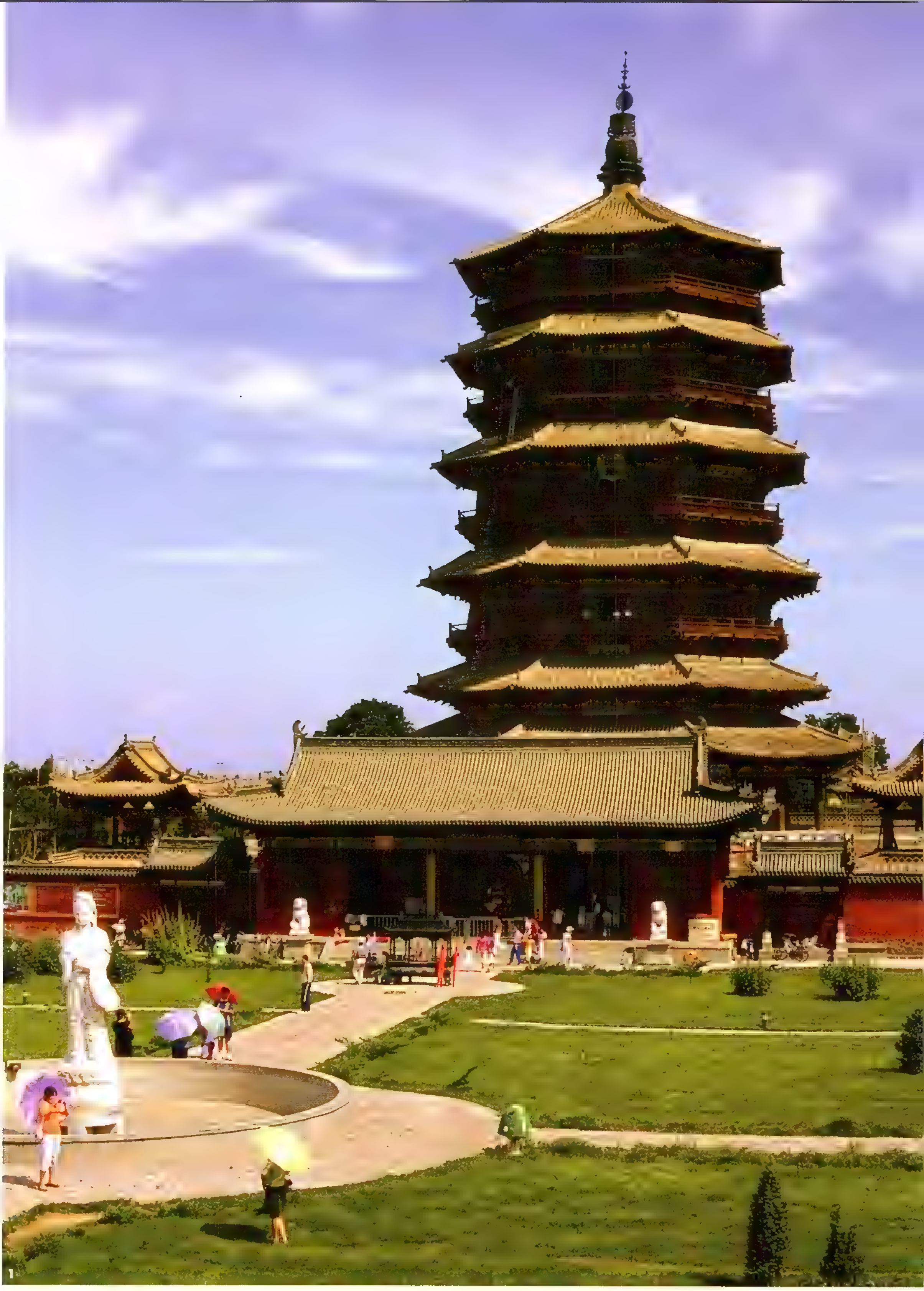
Admission: 60 yuan (It is 80 km from Datong to Mount Hengshan. You can take a mini-bus to Hunyuan. The bus departs from 8 am to 6 pm and costs 20 yuan. Then you can take a charter car to the Hanging Temple and Mount Hengshan, which costs 130 yuan.)

The Three Religions Hall, the highest place of the temple, enshrines the statue of *Sakyamuni* in the centre, Confucius (founder of Confucianism) on the right and Lao Zi (founder of Taoism) on the left.

Coincidentally, Confucius, Lao Zi and *Sakyamuni* appeared during the same time period more than 2,000 years ago. When Confucius was in his 30s, he asked Lao Zi about rites. *Sakyamuni* was 15 years older than Confucius. In the Han Dynasty, Taoism was established and Buddhism was introduced into China, which influenced the development of Confucianism. Soon after that, conflicts and friction started between the religions. During the Tang Dynasty (618 — 907), Emperor Taizong (599 — 649) elevated the position of Confucianism; meanwhile, he continued to respect Buddhism and Taoism and worshipped Lao Zi as the Supreme Lord. During the Song Dynasty (960 — 1279), the idea of 'cultivating one's mind through Buddhism, strengthening one's body through Taoism and running a country through Confucianism' prevailed. Since then the three religions have coexisted.

Temple Secrets

Although the Hanging Temple is used to be 80 to 90 m above from the bottom of the valley in the begining; now it is some 50 m above due to the rising of the riverbed. Construction workers first dug a row of holes into the rocks; the holes were bigger inside than at the mouth. Then they pounded one half of the tung-oil-soaked beams into the holes, leaving the other half exposed. In this way, the stronger the external force, the tighter the inside will be. Moreover, the fixed beams pass the pressure to the rocks, so they can serve as solid groundwork for the temple. By using the supporting force from the cliff, they were able to lay the floor and build the walls.



Oldest and Tallest

The Wooden Pagoda in Yingxian

1. The Yingxian Wooden Pagoda is the most ancient and tallest remaining wooden structure in the world.

2. Each storey of the tower has a plaque of calligraphy. Among them, the one 'Superb Artwork' written by Zhu Di (1360 — 1424), Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, and the one 'A Wonder under the Sky' written by Zhu Houzhao (1491 — 1521), Emperor Wuzong of the Ming Dynasty, are the most famous.

3. There is an 11-m statue of a sitting Sakyamuni on the first storey of the Pagoda.

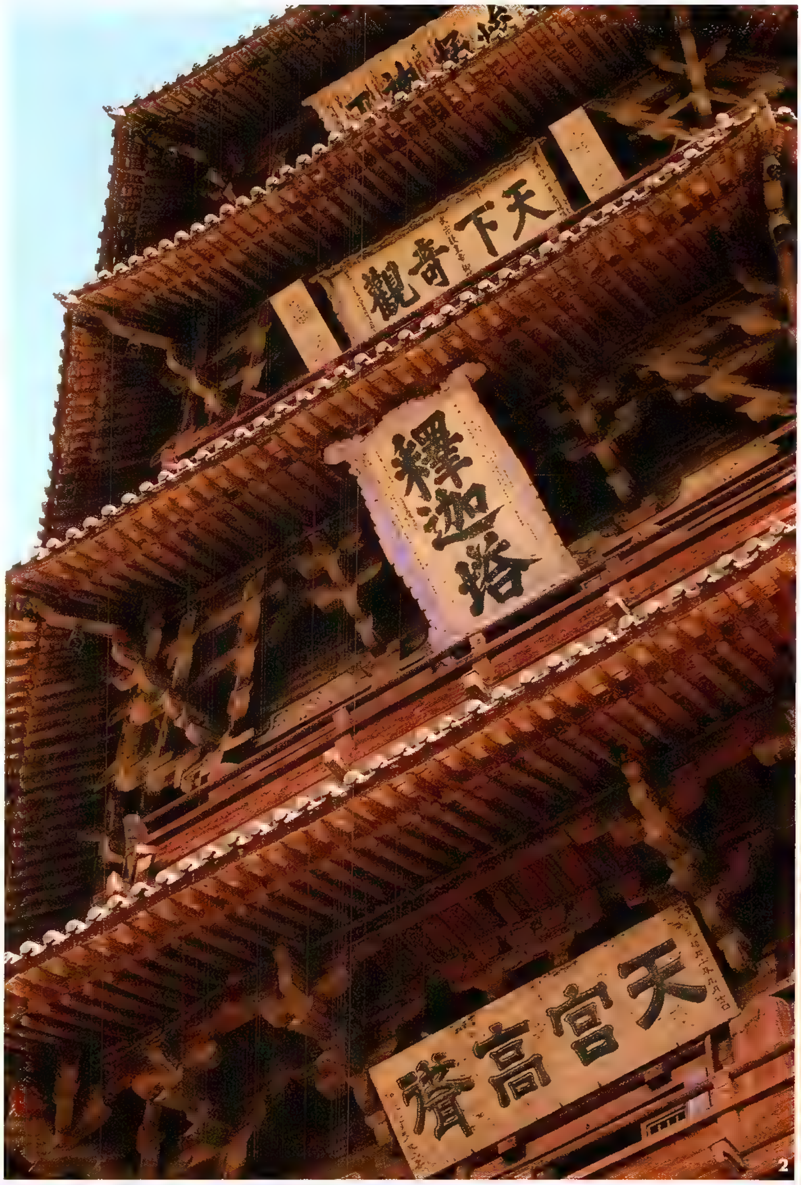
4. The exterior of each storey has a corridor and railings, from which you can have a distant view of the surroundings.

As Datong is one of China's important industrial coal-producing cities, blue skies are rarely seen here. I took a bus along the Dayun Highway to Yingxian.

When I arrived at Yingxian, the air quality was better. I was able to see the ancient and tall Yingxian Wooden Pagoda from afar. Also called the Sakyamuni Pagoda of Buddha Palace, this octagonal tower was built in the Fogong (Buddha Palace) Temple in 1056. At 67.13 m high and 30 m in diameter, it has nine stories, four of which are hidden. It is the most ancient and tallest wooden building in the world.

Reinforced by Rivets and Mortises

Entering the mountain gate of the Fogong Temple, I saw the solemn Wooden Pagoda on a stone base. After a closer look, I found that the first level of its eaves was edged with gorgeous blue-glazed tiles. The tower has two layers of octagonal wooden structures connected and supported by beams and brackets. There is not a single nail in the beams and brackets; they're fixed only by interlocking rivets and mortises.



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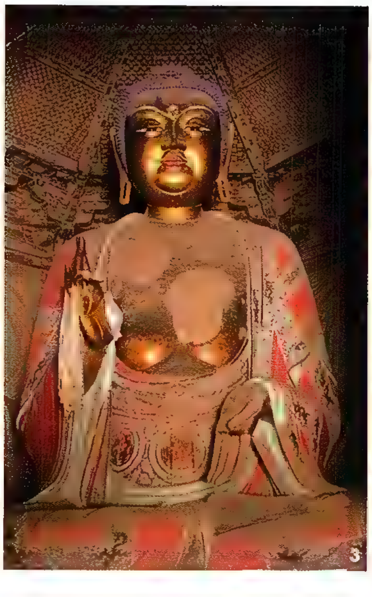
Admission: 60 yuan (There are mini-buses to Yingxian at the Datong Train Station; they depart at 7:30 am every day. The bus fare is 40 yuan.)

I ascended to the tower gate following the stone steps. I looked up and saw an 11-m statue of *Sakyamuni*. The statue shows a plump *Sakyamuni*, bearing a demure and amiable demeanour, as the lines of the statue's clothes are smooth. Visitors look very small in front of the huge statue to which many pious worshippers kneel down and pray.

Remains Untouched After Seven Earthquakes

In 1974, a large number of valuable cultural remains, such as the inscribed and written scriptures of the Liao Dynasty (907 — 1125), were found inside the Buddha statue. Since the Liao and Jin (1115 — 1234) dynasties, there have been seven severe earthquakes, among which the most severe happened in 1328 and lasted seven days. Many surrounding buildings collapsed, but the Wooden Pagoda remained untouched. This proves that the tower has a sound architectural design.

A spiral wooden staircase leads to each storey. From the second to fifth storey, each level has four doors, all installed with wooden latticework to let the light in. There were originally statues on each storey, however, only a few survived due to the lack of upkeep and the long history. Today, only the first four stories are opened to the public for protection. Even so, it has attracted many foreign visitors, among which Japanese and Germans constitute the majority and examine it especially carefully.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Jin Ancestral Temple

in Taiyuan

Taiyuan is the birthplace of the State of Jin in Western Zhou Dynasty (1046B.C.—771B.C.). When you visit Taiyuan, you shouldn't miss the chance to see the Jin Ancestral Temple.

Located at the foot of the Xuanweng Mountain, 25 km southwest of Taiyuan City, the Jin Ancestral Temple was built to commemorate Ji Yu, the founder of the State of Jin.

After entering the gate, you'll first see the Water Mirror Opera Stage. 'Water Mirror' in Chinese means that 'no matter if you are good or evil, loyal or treacherous, your true self will eventually be revealed to others'. The Jin Ancestral Temple used to hold tens of sacrificial ceremonies every year, many of which contained operatic performances. Opera of that time always attracted big crowds, especially on the Heavenly Mother's birthday (the second day of the seventh lunar month).

Behind the Stage, there was the Jinren (Golden Men) Terrace. On the terrace there is a glaze-tiled pavilion and four iron-armoured warrior statues.

1. The Nanlao (Everlasting) Spring in front of the Shuimu Building is the major water source for the Jin River.

2. The Duiyue Memorial Archway standing on the axis of the Jin Ancestral Temple.

3. These life-like servants holding different musical instruments in their hands have very natural gestures, and even the creases on their clothes look natural and smooth. They are amazing artworks.

4. The top of on the Nanlao Spring pavilion.

5. During the Northern Song Dynasty, the Jin River often flooded. The locals built four armoured warrior statues at the water source of the river, in the hope of preventing floods.

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The one to the southwest is the only genuine one while also being the finest. It is said that the other three were created by local craftsmen while this one was made by an eminent master from Mount Song. This is why it has never rusted; even after nearly a millennium.

The Only Bridge of Its Kind in China

Heading west from the Hall of Sacrificial Ceremonies, I came to the 'Yu Zhao Fei Liang' (Flying Bridge over the Fish Pond). Ancient Chinese people called round ponds 'Chi' and square ones 'Zhao'. This pond is the second biggest water source of the Jin River. As it has a lot of fish, it is called 'Yu Zhao (Fish Pond) '. There is a bridge stretching over the pond, called 'Fei Liang (the Flying Bridge)'. Ancient bridges are mostly built in a straight line; this one however, is a cross-like bridge extending in four directions. Since there is no other bridge like that in China, it is very valuable.

Not Even One Exposed Column

The Hall of the Heavenly Mother, also the main hall of the Jin Ancestral Temple, faces the Fish Pond and stands against a green hill. Built from 979 to 984, it was named 'Heavenly Mother' because the imperial court conferred the title of 'Heavenly Mother of Salvation' on Ji Yu's mother, Yi Jiang, in 1077. In 1101, there was a serious earthquake which destroyed the hall; it was later rebuilt in 1102. In 1996, a large-scale renovation was launched by using the same kind of materials originally used and keeping its original look. The square hall is seven room-bays (a room-bay is the space between two columns. It is an ancient unit of measurement for the size of a room) in width and six room-bays in depth. Strangely, such a spacious hall has not a single

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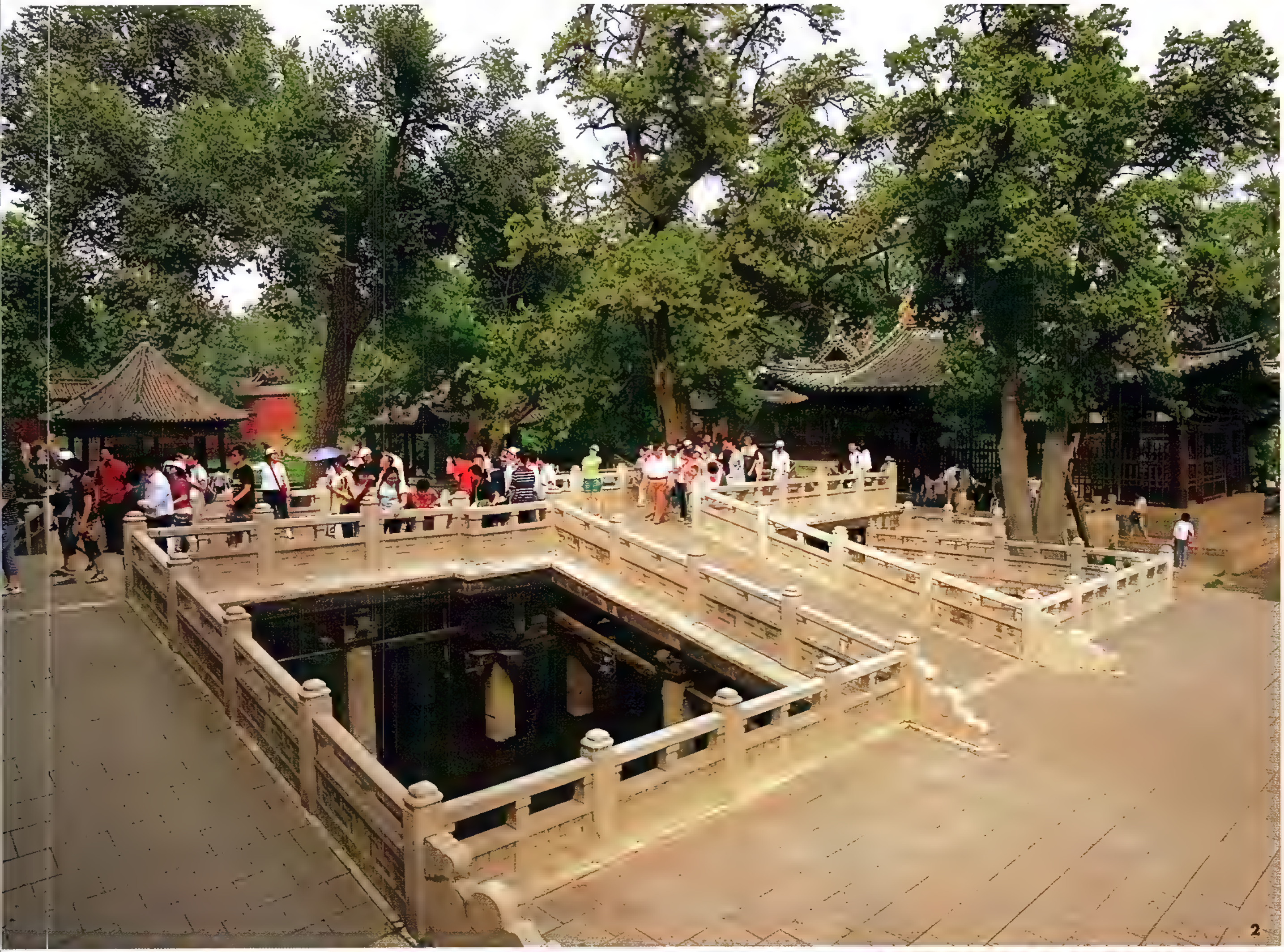
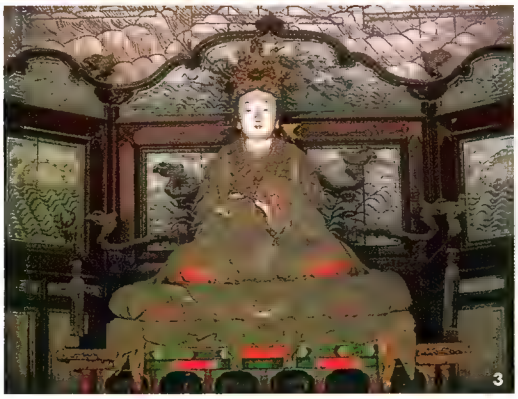


1. The carvings of eight spiral wooden dragons on the corridor columns were made with funds raised by Lü Ji and the Taiyuan government of the Song Dynasty.

2. With a history of at least 1,500 years, 'the Flying Bridge over the Fish Pond' is cross-liked, which is very rarely seen in ancient Chinese bridges.

3. The Hall of the Heavenly Mother is the main hall of the Jin Ancestral Temple. It attracts numerous visitors every day.



exposed column. It is supported by corridor columns and eave columns, in this way it saves 16 exposed columns, making the interior look very spacious. This demonstrates the superb architectural design of the Song Dynasty.

In the centre there is a statue of the Heavenly Mother, who wears a phoenix coronet, a ceremonial robe and a skirt. The statue is plump with eyes half open, focusing on the nose. She sits expressionless, with a demure demeanour. On both sides there are 42 colourful life-like Song Dynasty servant statues. Among them, four are female court officials wearing men's court uniforms, five eunuchs and 33 maidens. The four maidens closest to the Heavenly Mother are her most trusted servants. The two eunuchs closest to her are responsible for delivering orders. They are leaning slightly towards the Heavenly Mother, looking fearful of missing any word. The five standing on the north side and facing northward are opera singers, who play the five roles of *sheng* (male characters), *dan* (female characters), *jing* (characters with painted faces), *mo* (old men) and *chou* (clowns). They vividly reflect the court servants' feelings of happiness, anger, sadness and resentment.

Distance:
Taiyuan —> in Ancestral Temple: 25 km (take bus 8, 408, 804 at the Taiyuan Train Station. The bus ride is about 50 minutes)
Ticket: 40 yuan   Opening Hours: 9 am~6 pm
Accommodation: Jinguang Kuaijie Hotel in Taiyuan
Address: No. 156 Jianshe Road South   Tel.: (0351) 567 7123 / 562 8104
Double-occupancy Room: 160 yuan

Pingyao

Where Shanxi Businessmen Found Success

Pingyao, put on the World Cultural Heritage list by UNESCO in 1997, is the best preserved and most complete ancient city in China. It gives a lively picture of the extraordinary cultural, social, economic and religious development of the Ming (1368 — 1644) and Qing (1644 — 1911) dynasties. Originally built in (1046B.C. — 771B.C.) of the Western Zhou Dynasty, this city has experienced history of 2,800 years. The present framework of the city has been kept the same since the renovation and expansion in the third year of the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty in 1370. During the Qing Dynasty, it went through many renovations, which have contributed to its present shape.

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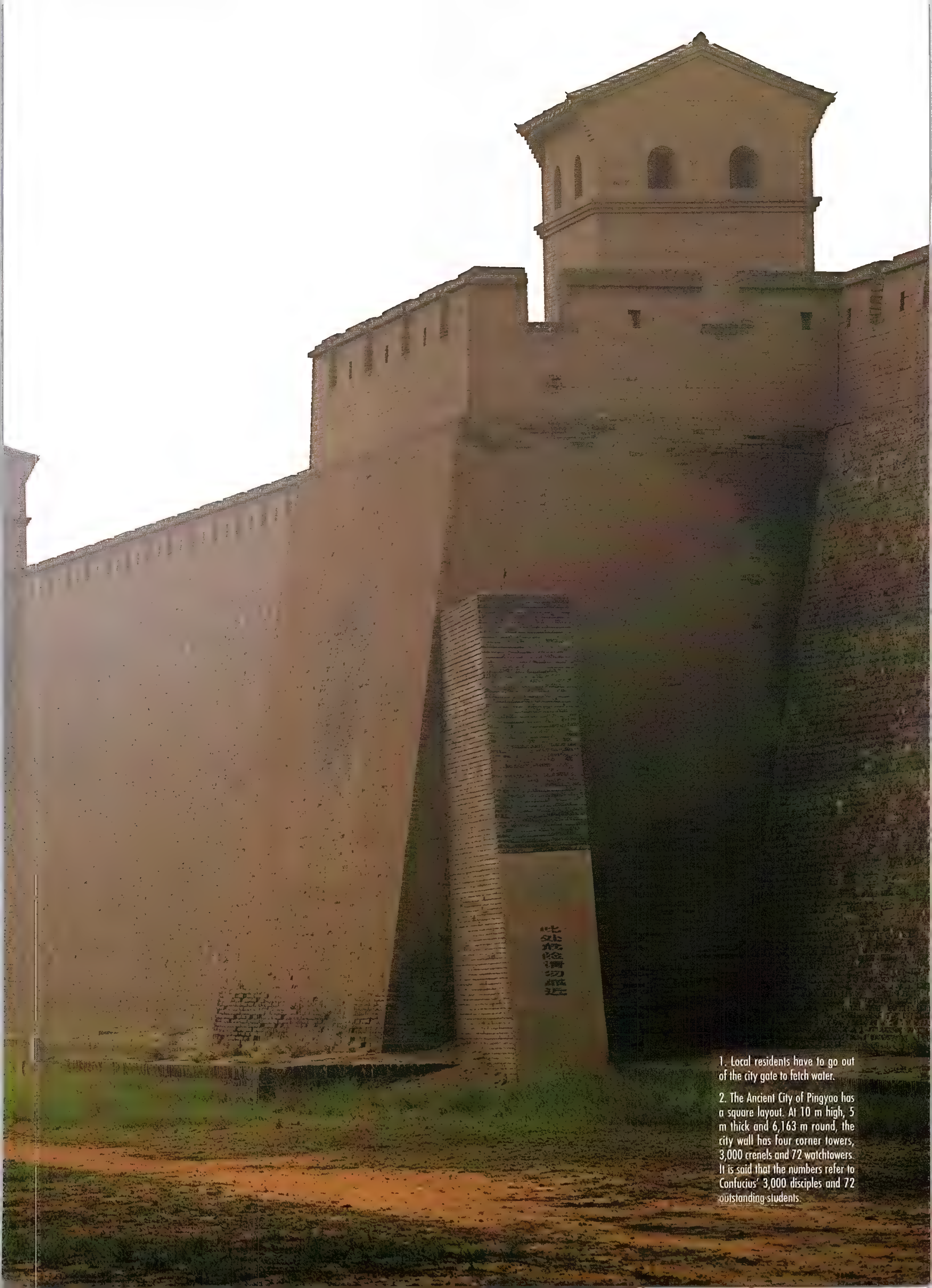
After entering the ancient vine-covered gate, I felt like I had gone through a time tunnel. Xiguan Street is flanked by time-honoured courtyard houses which gave birth to many legendary stories of successful Shanxi businessmen.

Started Off by Selling Salt

During the time when the remaining vicious Mongolian forces of the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368) were still the biggest threat to the Ming Dynasty, the Ming imperial government established nine towns of military importance



1. Local residents have to go out of the city gate to fetch water.

2. The Ancient City of Pingyao has a square layout. At 10 m high, 5 m thick and 6,163 m round, the city wall has four corner towers, 3,000 crenels and 72 watchtowers. It is said that the numbers refer to Confucius' 3,000 disciples and 72 outstanding students.

along the Great Wall. These towns were built in order to protect the Ming Dynasty's borders from being attacked by the Mongolian enemies. Among them, two were in Shanxi Province — Datong and Taiyuan. After these towns were established, finding a way to guarantee the troops' food and salary was a big headache for the government. In 1370, the imperial government enacted a new policy named the 'Kaizhong Law'. This allowed merchants to own certificates that gave them exclusive rights to sell salt as long as they transported food to the border areas. These merchants could get salt at the designated salt fields and then sell it in the designated areas. Salt is a necessity of life and was monopolised by the government, so, selling salt meant high profits. Favoured by Shanxi's geological conditions, smart Shanxi merchants grasped this opportunity and made a fortune. This was how Shanxi salt merchants emerged.

The Mother of China's Financial Organisations

In the 16th century, Pingyao had become a prosperous business centre in northern China. In the mid- and late 19th century, it reached its heyday and was a control centre of the financial industry in contemporary China. When speaking of China's contemporary financial industry, we must mention Lei Lütai. Born in Pingyao, he was apprenticed to a firm when he was a teenager. When he was about 30, he began working with a dye workshop named 'Xiyucheng'. During his tenure with Xiyucheng, he worked his way up the ranks to become the manager of the Hankou branch store and the director of the Beijing branch store. He followed the business rules strictly and built up his credit in the market. Later, because of his outstanding sales, he was highly valued by the workshop owner and was transferred to the Pingyao headquarters to work as the general manager. With his superb talent, he soon made Xiyucheng a name brand for dyes in China. While he was working at the Beijing branch store, some Pingyao merchants deposited money in the Beijing branch, then the Beijing branch delivered a message to the Pingyao headquarters saying that the person who deposited money could take out the same amount of money from there. In the beginning, Lei Lütai only did this to help out his friends. Soon after, more and more people asked for this kind of service, so the Beijing branch started to charge a small percentage on the deposited money. Lei Lütai foresaw the business opportunity behind this service. When he returned to Pingyao, he convinced the owner to separate the business capital from the financial capital and change the dye business to a bank which specialised in money exchange, deposits and loans.

Rishengchang Spread to Foreign Countries

In 1823, the owner of Xiyucheng invested

1. Bicycles are a major means of transportation in the Ancient City of Pingyao.

2. Traditional Pingyao handmade embroidered shoes are a favourite souvenir among Chinese and international tourists.

3. The old man holding a writing brush in his hand copies Rishengchang's bank notes, on which there are the customer's name, remittance address and the amount of the note. Tourists are very happy to buy the copied note.

4. In the morning, the ancient city gate is bustling with carts, horses and people.

5. An old man has passed away. His several hundred relatives have come to the funeral. Pingyao retains its original style.

6. Tofu pudding, a Pingyao snack, costs only 1 yuan per bowl. It is cheap and tasty.

300,000 taels (a monetary unit formerly used in China, equivalent in value to this weight of standard silver) of silver in the banking business. Lei Lütai replaced the original signboard of 'Xiyucheng' with 'Rishengchang'. This first bank in Chinese history was opened. Soon people were surprised to see that Rishengchang dealt with bank notes with Chinese characters and passwords instead of dyes. With this kind of note, anyone could exchange money at a Rishengchang branch office in any city. This special money exchange service was quick, easy and safe, which greatly reduced the risk of being robbed on the road; it quickly replaced the old way of sending money by hiring a professional escort agency.

In order to prevent fake notes, Rishengchang also thought to print special marks on the notes. Rishengchang's business became bigger, and it was soon responsible for almost all governmental and private money exchange, deposits and loans. It became the earliest financial body in China. With the influence of Rishengchang, there were more than 30 Shanxi banks by the end of the 19th century, with more than 400 branch offices. The network of Shanxi banks covered over 80 cities in China and even reached other countries, such as Japan, North Korea and Singapore. Back in that time, on the South and West Streets in the city of Pingyao, there were more than 20 bank headquarters, constituting more than half of the total in the country. It was indeed the base of China's financial industry. West Street in Pingyao was called 'The Chinese Wall Street' by foreign economists.

Lining Up to Remit Money

Walking about 100 m eastward along West Street, you'll see the original site of the Rishengchang Bank. The front gate is not big, and inside are three layers of courtyard houses. The front courtyard consists of a reception room, a note room and an accountant's office. The wing rooms of the middle and rear courtyards include a sitting room, a guest room and the general manager's and assistant manager's offices. The entire compound is covered by an iron net tied with bronze bells. When the front door is closed, the whole courtyard complex is inaccessible even to birds.

At present, Rishengchang has been transformed into the China Money Exchange Museum, which attracts many tourists. In the rear yard, I saw many people standing around a table. At the table, an old man wearing a black leather hat and a blue robe was copying the Rishengchang notes on which there were the customers' names, remittance address and the amount of the note. He charged

4

5

6

Distance:

Taiyuan → Pingyao: 90 km (There are many trains and buses that go from Taiyuan to Pingyao. Buses depart every 20 minutes from 7 am to 5:30 pm on the square in front of the train station.)

Admission for the Ancient City of Pingyao: 120 yuan (all-inclusive ticket)

Pingyao Zhengjia International Hostel Address: No. 68 Yamen Street Tel.: (0354) 568 4466

Double-occupancy Room: 120 yuan (free Internet)

SAKURA Kim CAFEBAR
櫻花屋
酒吧
spaghetti
pizza
lasagna
American Breakfast
Continental
姜糖作坊
SAKURA BAR

15 yuan for one copy. His wife stood beside him collecting money.

Not far east from Rishengchang is the north end of South Street. On the south side of the street is the City Tower, which is the highest building in the city, as well as its centre. Ascending the tower and overlooking the city, you have a panoramic view of the entire ancient city. Bustling South Street is 4.5 m wide, and the most prosperous business street in Pingyao. Well preserved in the style of the Ming and Qing dynasties, this street is home to a great number of ancient brick-and-wood houses and shop-fronts. Also called the Ancient Street of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it showcases various souvenir stores, including Shanxi paper-cuttings, embroidered cloth shoes, Shanxi vinegar and bamboo-leaf green wine of Xinghua Village.

Long-stay Foreign Visitors — Excellent Bargainers

There are many scenic sites along Pingyao's old streets, including the ancient government office, the Town God Temple, the Qingxu Taoist Temple, the Confucius Temple, the Tongxinggong Armed Escort Agency, the Tianjixiang Museum and the China Museum of Escort Agencies. These sites are very close to each other. More than ten years ago, Zhang Yimou's movie 'Raise the Red Lantern (1991)' filmed in Pingyao brought fame to Shanxi courtyard houses. Since then, many of these courtyard houses have adorned their front doors, corridors and yards with red lanterns, without caring whether it's suitable or not. I think, by doing so, the courtyard houses' original flavours and distinctive features have been lost. What a pity! However, this doesn't seem to bother tourist groups at all.

1. When night falls, the shops' lights are turned on. The ancient city takes on a new look.

2. Many international tourists often sit relaxing in a cafe, reading books and chatting with friends.

Many of the tourists are from the West. Unlike most Chinese tourists who rush to see everything, the Westerners often sit in street-side cafes. When they are tired, they look up at the sky or pedestrians; or go check emails. They are concentrated in a few hotels recommended by English websites and travel guides. The owners of these hotels are young and can speak some simple English, Japanese, French and Spanish. The hotel signs and menus are in both Chinese and English. With a Western-style decor, these hotels are popular in Pingyao, which mostly attracts foreign visitors and some young Chinese university students and white-collar workers. But traditional Chinese tourists don't like this kind of hotel because they are not used to the different cultural environment and cuisine. A hotel owner told me that foreign customers learn bargaining skills very fast. Ten years ago, there were very few foreign visitors to Pingyao. After it was put on the list of World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 1997, it became world famous. The annual Pingyao International Photography Festival attracts even more international visitors to the city. When Chinese people have dinner with friends, they order a full table of food and compete to pay the bill while Westerners share the bill. They bargain even harder than Chinese customers when buying from shops. If the salesperson tries to negotiate a higher price with them, they will often turn around and leave. Then the salesperson can do nothing but agree to the price proposed by the foreign customer.

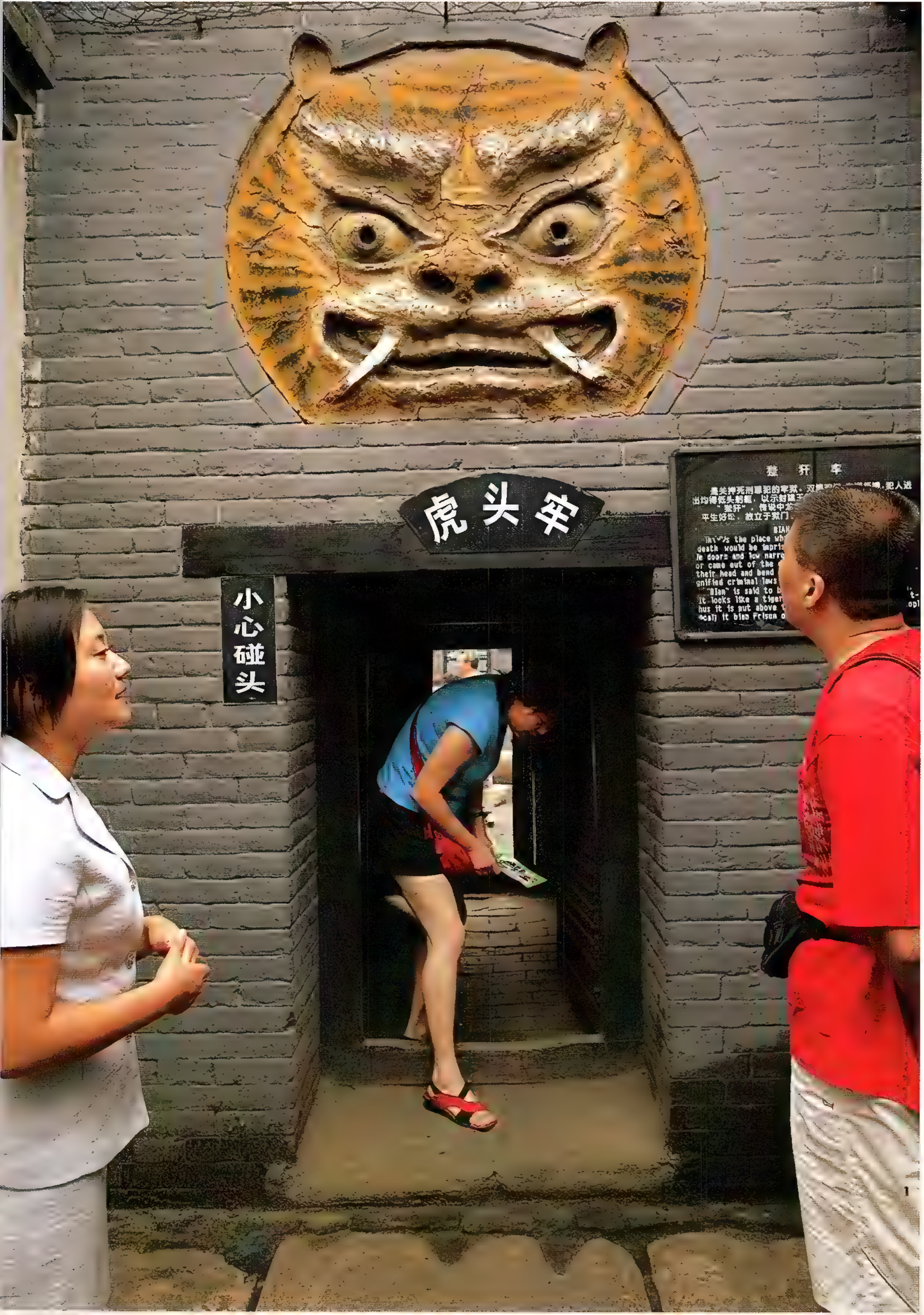
A Bicycle Tour around the Ancient City Walls

Covering an area of 2.25 sq km, the Ancient City of Pingyao has several main roads: South Street, East Street and West Street, Yamen Street and Cheng Huang (Town God) Temple Street. Cars are forbidden on these streets. So if you plan to visit the ancient city, I suggest you had better rent a bicycle. It is very convenient to get around in small lanes and visit courtyard houses by bike.

Pingyao boasts over 3,000 ancient houses of various kinds. They are mostly black-brick and grey-tile *siheyuan* (courtyard houses) encircled by walls. Their layout, design, size and rank reflect the feudal patriarchal system of that time. These houses are categorised into three kinds: ordinary brick-and-tile wooden-structured houses; brick cave-houses with wooden corridors and extended tile eaves; and brick cave-houses added with another storey of a brick-and-tile wooden structure. The latter two kinds of houses combine the typical cave-like houses in the hilly region of the Loess Plateau with the brick-and-wood structures in the plains. They are sturdy, durable, and warm in winter and cool in summer. With fine wooden, stone and brick carvings and colourful paintings on the beams, they are representative of the local architecture.

Su San's Prison

Yu Tangchun – Framed and Jailed



1. On the top of the door of the Death Penalty Cell there is a picture of some kind of animal's head. With a ferocious dark face and scary fangs, it resembles a tiger at first glance. But it actually is a mythological animal — Bi'an.

2. Su San's Prison of the Ming Dynasty is the oldest prison in Chinese history.

3. At present, you are able to enjoy one of the scenes of *The Faithful Harlot— Su San* to Set out for a Retrial in the Dahuaishu Scenic Area in Hongdong.

Hongdong County's fame was most likely brought about by the famous Peking Opera show *The Faithful Harlot (Yu Tangchun)*, which tells the story of a harlot, Su San (also known as Yu Tangchun).

This is a touching love story filled with twists and turns. Su San, a famous harlot from the capital city Beijing of the Ming Dynasty, was falsely incriminated and put into jail. As the story goes, when Su San was little, she was abducted and sold to a Beijing brothel, owned by a person surnamed Su. She met Wang Jinglong, an official's son, in the brothel one day. They fell in love and swore to be together forever. Wang Jinglong eventually spent all his money and ended up homeless. As soon as Su San heard the news, she gave all her savings and jewellery to him. She also encouraged him to study hard to pass the imperial examination so that some day he could become a government official and return to redeem her.

2

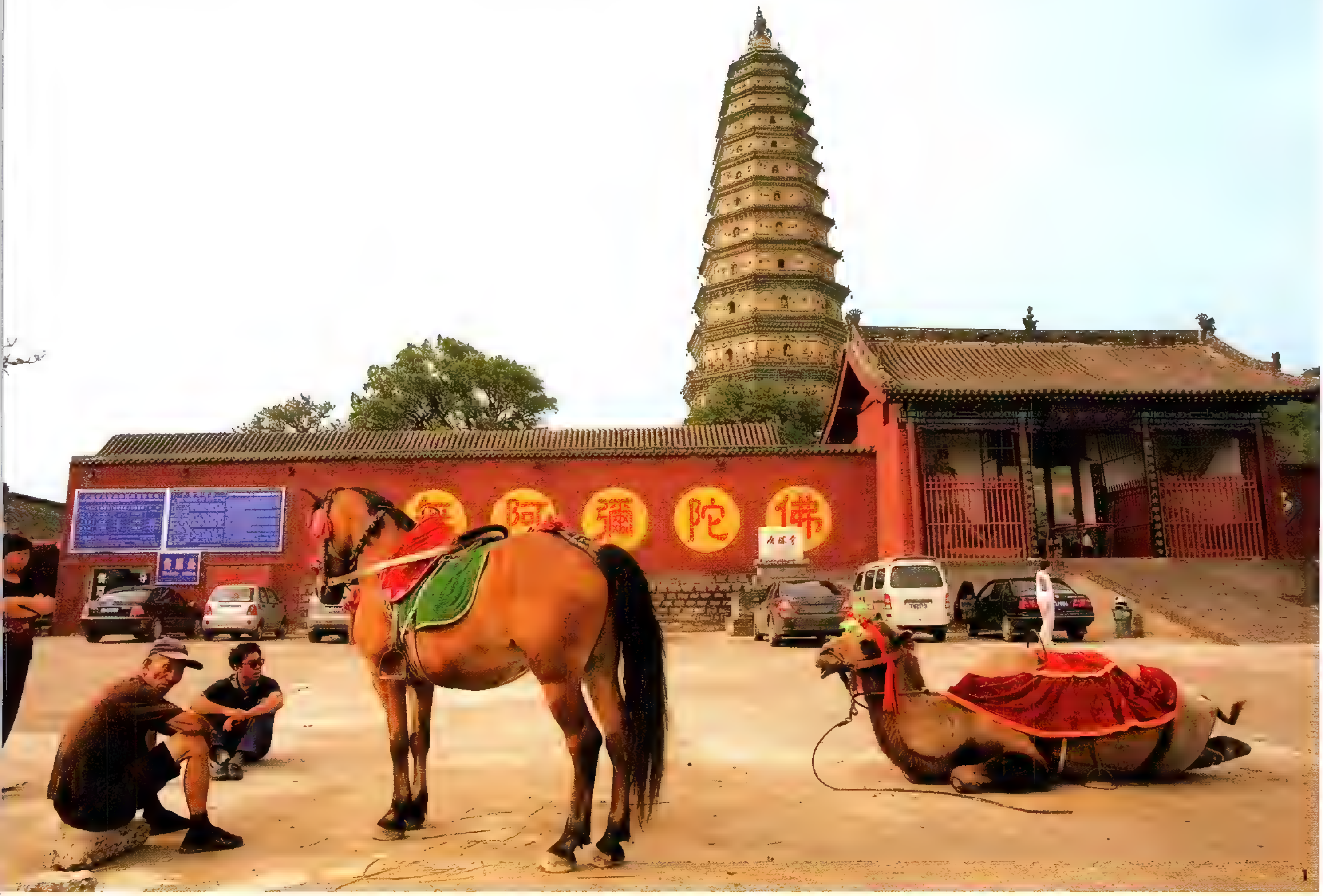
Admission: Su San's Prison: 20 yuan (A taxi ride from the Hongdong Bus Station to Su San's Prison costs 4 yuan.)

Su San Was Framed for Killing Her Husband

After Wang Jinglong left, Su San refused to receive any other customers, so she was sold to Shen Hong, a Shanxi merchant, as his concubine. Shen Hong's first wife, Pi, was very jealous. She planned to poison Su San; to her surprise, she accidentally poisoned her husband. In order to get away with it, she framed Su San for her husband's death and then bribed the Hongdong County magistrate to sentence Su San to death. Fortunately, Wang Jinglong, Su San's former lover, did pass the imperial examination and was that year appointed as a provincial inspector. Upon hearing that Su San had been sold to Hongdong in Shanxi, he wasted no time getting to Hongdong. He investigated the case and finally uncovered the truth and saved Su San. The two were finally reunited.

Inside the ornamental gate is a white marble statue of Su San wearing a sad expression and gazing outside, as if she is thinking about her lover. In the southwest corner of the courtyard is the prison. Everything here gives you a creepy feeling. On the top of the door of the Death Penalty Cell there is a picture of some kind of animal's head. With a ferocious dark face and scary fangs, it resembles a tiger at first glance. But it actually is a mythological animal — *Bi'an* (one of the dragon's nine sons, which detests criminals). The door is only half the size of an ordinary door. The Death Penalty Cell has two doors. The first one opens from the right side and needs to be pushed while the second opens from the left side and needs to be pulled. This design was used to confuse and delay prisoners who tried to break out and so the prison officers could notice it. Walking further in through a narrow *hutong* (small lane), we came to the women's cells. Our guide pointed at one cell which faced southward and told us, 'That is where Su San was imprisoned.'

3



Guangsheng Temple

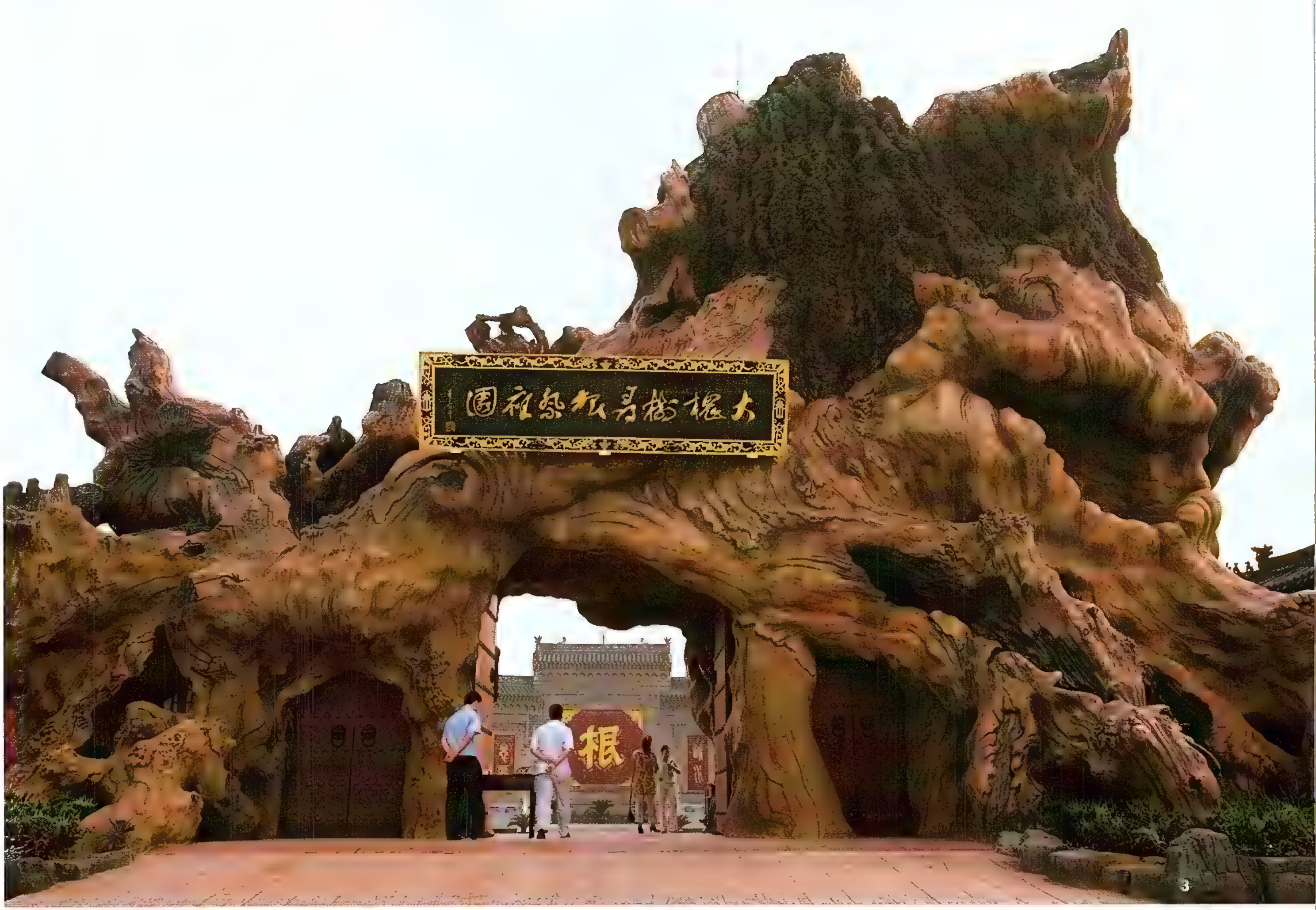
Small But Important

The Guangsheng (Universal Victory) Temple is very important despite its diminutive size. As one of the first key cultural units put under state protection, the Guangsheng Temple was built in the Eastern Han Dynasty in 147 and is also one of the oldest Buddhist temples. As far as I know, the first group of cultural remains put under state protection are all national treasures.

The present octagonal 13-storey tower was built in the Ming Dynasty in 1527. Covered by seven colours, this tower has various beautiful patterns of pavilions. Each level has special patterns; It has been named the No. 1 glazed tower in China.

The Shuishen (Water God) Temple next to it is actually a Taoist temple. Its main hall features beautiful murals. I was most interested in the mural of the Yuan Dynasty *zaju* (poetic drama set to music). It portrays the different roles of *sheng*, *dan*, *jing*, *mo* and *chou*. The mural also depicts props such as knives, swords, an ivory tablet used by officials in the imperial court, and fans; it also features the accompanying musical instruments, which typifies a well-developed art form of the Yuan Dynasty.

Admission: Upper Guangsheng Temple 16 yuan, Lower Guangsheng Temple 10 yuan (Bus No. 5 takes you directly from Hongdong County proper to the temple. The bus fare is 2 yuan.)



Big Pagoda Tree

the Starting Place of a Large-scale Migration

1. The Guangsheng Temple is one of the first key cultural units put under state protection.

2. The mural of drama in the Water God Temple vividly reflects the development of the Yuan Dynasty drama, and is very valuable.

3. The Ming Dynasty Government organised eight large-scale forced migrations over 50 years, extending from the Hongwu reign to the 15th year of the Yongle reign.

4. The spot under the Big Pagoda Tree where visitors search for their roots and pray to their ancestors.

'If you ask me where my ancestors came from, I will answer you he was from the Big Pagoda Tree in Hongdong. What is the name of my ancestor's home? It is Old Storks' Nest (Lao Huan Wo).' Over the past a few hundred years, this ballad has been widely spread to all over China. It derives from the late Yuan Dynasty. Large groups of refugees moved to south Shanxi, quickly making it a densely populated area. In order to boost the economy, the Ming imperial government organised eight large-scale forced migrations over 50 years extending from 1368 to 1417.

The Ming government set up an immigration office under the Big Pagoda Tree in front of the Guangji Temple in Hongdong. This was where migrants were sent to be registered.

Those migrants were mostly distributed in Henan, Hebei, Shandong, Beijing, Jiangsu, Anhui, Hunan and Hubei. In Chinese history there is only one such long-lasting, large-scale and well-organised migration. The Big Pagoda Tree in Hongdong has consequently become the place where the migrants' descendents came to search for their roots and pray to their ancestors.

Admission: Big Pagoda Tree 15 yuan (There are mini buses at the Hongdong Bus Station that go directly to the scenic area. The bus fare is 2 yuan.)

尋根祭祖
古大槐樹處
4

Guandi Temple at Xiezhou

The Largest of its Kind in China

Guan Yu (160 — 219), a general of the State of Shu (221 — 263) during the Three Kingdoms Period (220 — 280), is well known to all Chinese people.

In 219, Guan Yu led his troops to conquer Fancheng (presents Xiangfan City in Hubei Province). During this battle, he drowned seven enemy army corps and captured Cao Cao's (155 — 220, founder of the State of Wei) general Yu Jin. Unexpectedly, Sun Quan (182 — 252, founder of the State of Wu) seized this opportunity and raided Guan Yu's troops from behind. Guan Yu was defeated and had to retreat to Maicheng (southeast of present Dangyang, Hubei Province) to defend his troops, but sadly he ended up being executed there.

After Guan Yu died, people who admired his loyalty, filial piety, integrity and bravery deified him. The emperors of later dynasties also admired and worshipped Guan Yu, and gave him many honourable titles.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Guan Yu was given the titles of 'Lord of the Military' and 'Saint of the Military', and enjoyed the same status as Confucius, the civil saint. It is because of Guan Yu's greatness that in China, Guandi (Lord Guan Yu) temples rank second in number next to Confucius temples.

The Temple Classed as a Palace

Xiezhou was Guan Yu's hometown. The Guandi Temple in Xiezhou was built in 589 in the Sui Dynasty and was later rebuilt, renovated and expanded many times. The last time it was rebuilt in the 18th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign of the Qing Dynasty (1753). It took ten years to restore its original structure, and ever since it has remained the same.

The Guandi Temple in Xiezhou is not only the oldest, but also the largest such temple in China. It consists of south and north sections. The south section is the Jieyi (To Be Sworn Brothers) Garden and the north is the temple section. The temple section is divided into two layers of courtyards, front and rear. At the front is the shrine hall and to the rear is the sleeping palace. This is a typical imperial palace layout, with 'the front hall being the imperial court and the back the sleeping palace'. Among all Guandi temples in China, this is the only one of its kind.

1. Behind the Chongning Hall is the Sleeping Palace.

2. The Chongning Hall is the main building of the Guandi Temple. It enshrines the statue of Guan Yu who wears an emperor's crown decorated with tassels, a dragon-pattern robe and a jade belt.

3. Covering an area of 140,000 sq m, the Guandi Temple in Xiezhou is the largest of its kind in China. (photo by Jia Hongjie)

Admission for the Guandi Temple in Xiezhou: 48 yuan (Take Bus No. 11 at the square in front of the Yucheng Station. The bus fare is 2 yuan.)

From an Outstanding General to a Deity

The Chongning (Admiring Tranquillity) Hall is the main building of the Guandi Temple. The minaret in front of the hall looks majestic, accompanied by ornamental pillars, iron flag poles and Guan Yu's Broadsword of the Black Dragon and Moon. Guan Yu's broadsword weighs 150 kg. This immensely heavy weapon could only be wielded by Guan Yu.

Behind the Chongning Hall is the Sleeping Palace, passing through a wooden memorial archway, you'll reach the highest building of the temple section — Chunqiu (Spring and Autumn) Tower. This building is more than 30 m tall, with two storeys and three levels of eaves. Both storeys have corridors with railings. The first storey enshrines a seated gilded statue of Guan Yu wearing an emperor's robes.

Over the past few hundred years, Lord Guan Yu has represented a perfect image of Chinese moral ethics. As Guan Yu cared most about loyalty, credibility, and righteousness, he has also been worshipped by policemen and businesspeople, especially Hong Kong and Taiwan merchants. They like to enshrine a statue of Guan Yu in their shops, in order to show their credibility and prevent evil and bad luck.

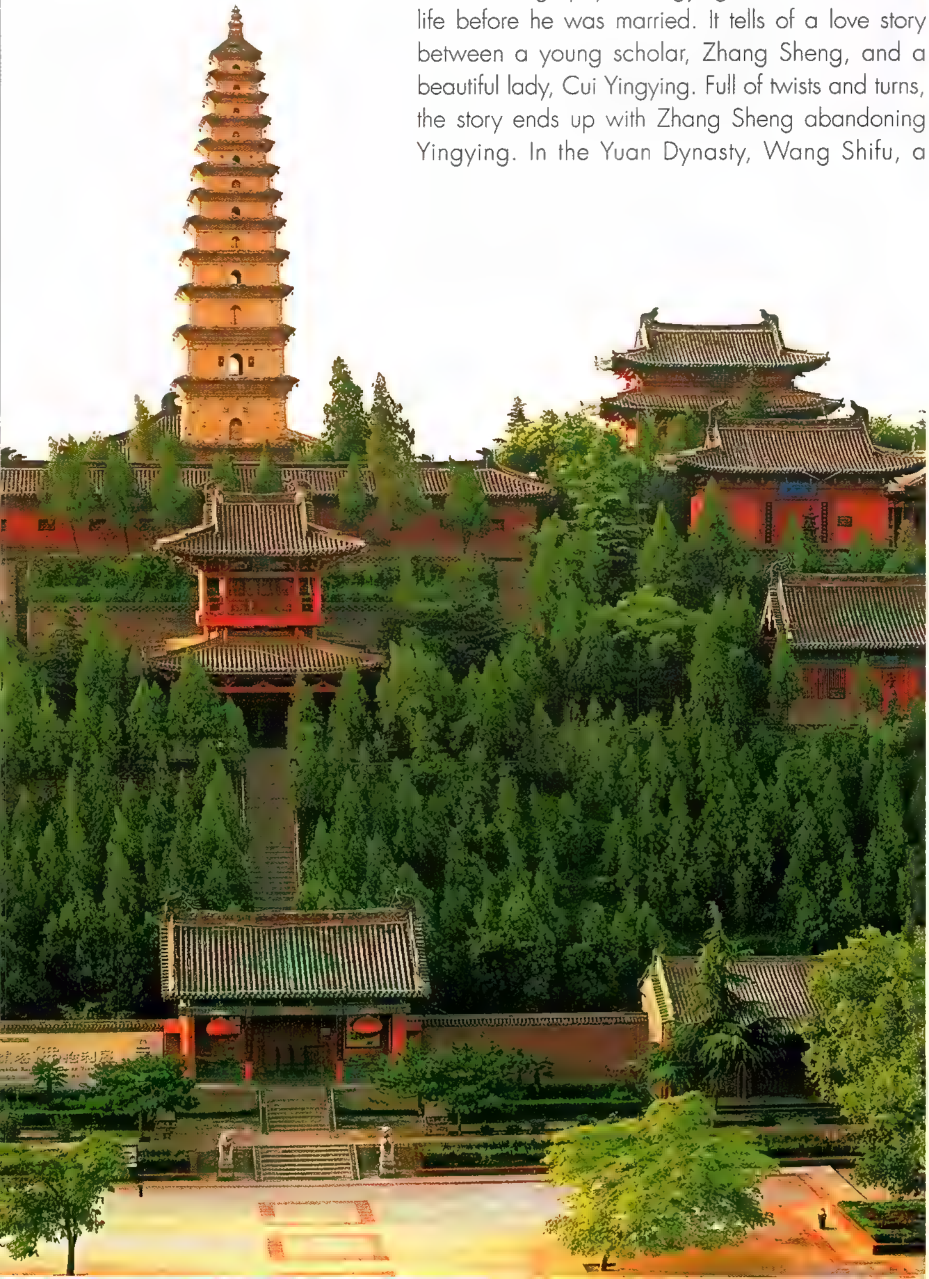
Pujiu Temple

The Tale of the West Chamber

2

The Pujiu (Universal Salvation) Temple, built in the first year of the Sui Dynasty (581—618), gained its fame through the Yuan Dynasty *zaju* (poetic drama set to music) — *Tale of the West Chamber*. This tale has a direct connection with Yuan Zhen (779—831), a Tang Dynasty poet.

The Tale of the West Chamber was widely spread among people before it was made into a classic romantic drama. The drama has been performed on stage again and again, and never *fails to* attract a huge audience. Yuan Zhen wrote a novella, *Biography of Yingying*, based on his love life before he was married. It tells of a love story between a young scholar, Zhang Sheng, and a beautiful lady, Cui Yingying. Full of twists and turns, the story ends up with Zhang Sheng abandoning Yingying. In the Yuan Dynasty, Wang Shifu, a dramatist, adapted the Biography of Yingying into *the Tale of the West Chamber* and changed the sad ending into a happy ending where the couple were finally married.

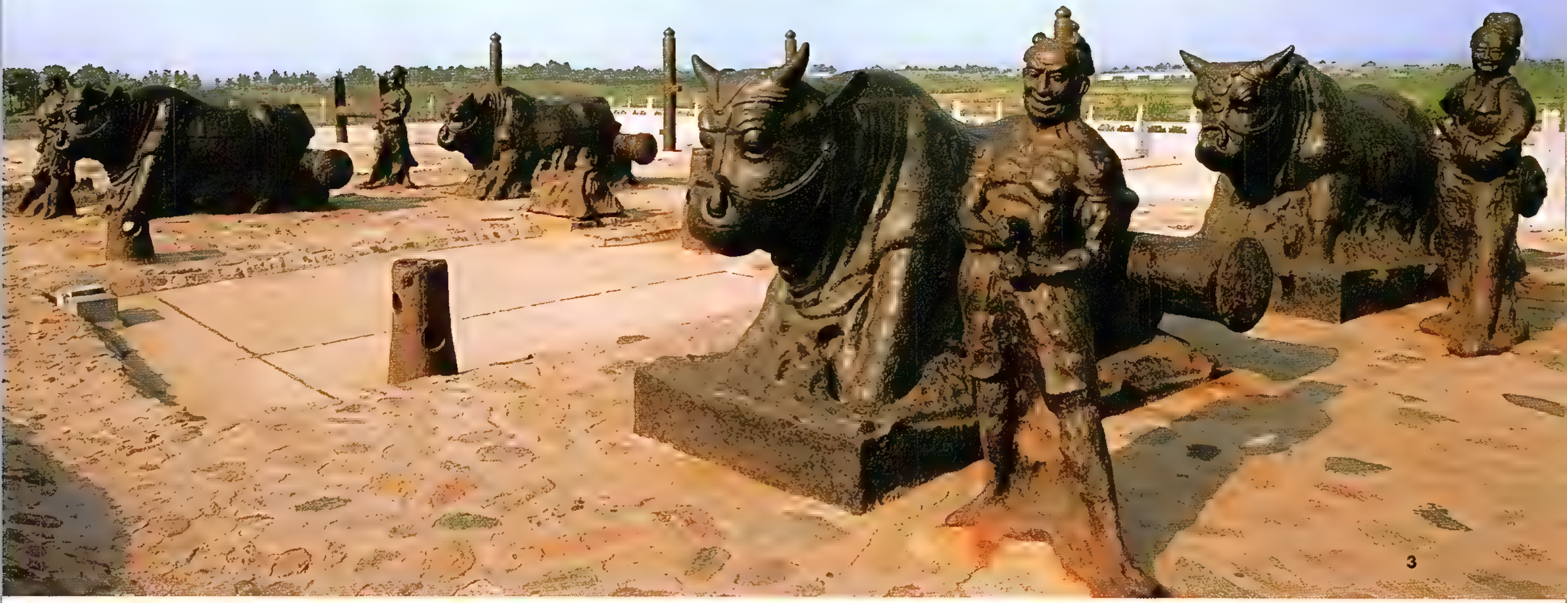


The Setting of the Tale of the West Chamber

The Pujiu Temple stands against a hill. Within the temple grounds, the most conspicuous building is the Sharira Tower built in the Tang Dynasty, 50 m high and with 13 levels. Renovated in the Ming Dynasty, the tower has mostly retained its Tang Dynasty style. It is also known as the Yingying Tower. Another famous spot in the temple is the West Chamber College. It is said that Zhang Sheng stayed in the West Chamber and that was the exact spot where the tale occurred. Not far away from the West Chamber, you'll see a tranquil courtyard house, the place where Yingying and her mother stayed in the drama. Behind the courtyard house is the garden where Zhang Sheng, who climbed over the wall at night, to meet Cui Yingying secretly, and vowed to be together forever.

The Pujiu Temple, encircled by red walls and highlighted by an ancient tower, vividly restages the settings of *the Tale of the West Chamber*. In truth, the temple has nothing to do with the tale, but people love to associate historical places with some kind of memorable story even if it is just a story.

Admission: 25 yuan (Bus No. 2 at the Yongji Train Station.
The bus fare is 2 yuan.)



The Kaiyuan Iron Oxen

A Dock on the Yellow River

The Pujin Dock at the middle reaches of the Yellow River has long been a transport hub on the Yellow River. History records that the Yellow River often changed its course and submerged many riverside counties and houses. In the ninth year of the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang Dynasty (721), due to the salt and iron trade between Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, Emperor Xuanzong sent Zhang Shuo, Minister of Military, to take in charge of the project of the Pujin Floating Bridge. He then hired many skilled workers to cast iron oxen as anchors and make long iron chains as railings.

The completion of the bridge greatly improved the transportation between Shanxi Province and the capital city Chang'an (present Xi'an) and also boosted the economy and culture of the regions on both banks of the Yellow River. As the Iron Ox was made in the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang Dynasty, it has been named the Kaiyuan Iron Ox. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty (1271 — 1368), the course of the Yellow River changed and the bridge was therefore left unused and fell into ruin. After a long time, the riverbeds also changed. The abandoned iron oxen had been buried under the mud flushed downstream from the upper reaches.

Iron Oxen and Iron Men Statues Excavated

In August 1989, archaeologists discovered the ruins of the Pujin Dock on the east bank of the ancient Yellow River's course, 51 m from the west city wall of the ancient Puzhou City and 110 m from the west city gate. The archaeologists set up a protection area around the site. They dug out four iron oxen, of 1.5 m tall and 3.3 m long. They all faced the Yellow River, with two on each bank. In a lying position, the realistic oxen have widely opened eyes, looking as if they are carrying heavy burdens. Beside the iron ox there is an iron man statue with a straight nose and deep eye sockets. The four iron oxen and four iron men vary from each other. It is estimated that each iron ox weighs 34 tonnes. The iron men statues, bases, columns, iron hill-shaped supporters and chains weighed more than 70 tonnes. Limited by the lifting technology of that time, people could not transport iron from other places, so they could only smelt iron using local materials.

It is said that this huge project used more than 80 percent of the country's total iron and tin resources. Actually, in ancient China such a huge project could only be completed in the Kaiyuan reign period (one of the most prosperous historical periods in China), the heyday of the Tang Dynasty.

1. The Pujiu Temple stands against a hill. Within the temple grounds, the most conspicuous building is the Sharira Tower built in the Tang Dynasty.

2. Behind the courtyard house is the garden where Zhang Sheng who climbed over the wall at night to meet Cui Yingying secretly and vowed to be together forever.

3. The Kaiyuan Iron Oxen were used as anchors of the Pujin Dock floating Bridge during the Tang Dynasty.

4. The excavated Kaiyuan Iron Oxen prove that the Tang Dynasty had very advanced casting technology.

Admission: 15 yuan (The Iron Oxen are three km from the Pujiu Temple. You can take a motor tricycle, which costs 6 yuan.)

Guanque Tower

Gained Its Fame through a Poem

The Guanque (Stork) Tower is another building in China that gained its fame through a Tang Dynasty poem.

Located on the banks of the Yellow River in southwest Shanxi, the Guanque Tower was originally built by generals and soldiers as a watchtower for military purposes. After this three-storey building was completed, storks often flocked under the tower, hence the name Stork Tower. In the Tang Dynasty (618 — 907), it had lost its military value. However, after being renovated and reinforced it had become a spectacular scenic spot along the Yellow River in Puzhou.

One day when night fell and the tourists had left, Wang Zhihuan (688 — 742, a Tang Dynasty poet) came to the Guanque Tower and ascended the staircase. Standing on the top and looking westward, he saw that the sun set in the undulating mountains. Then he turned his face to the east, seeing the roaring Yellow River seeming to pour down from the sky. All of a sudden, he was inspired by the breathtaking scene and wrote the poem, *On the Stork Tower:*

The sun beyond the mountain glows;
The yellow river seaward flows.
You will enjoy a grander sight;
By climbing to a greater height.

The first two verses describe the spectacular scenery that the poet saw, including the sunset, mountains and roaring river. The last two verses are a metaphor that one has to work harder if he wants to make more progress. It uses simple language to deliver a profound message. As it reads nicely and is easy to understand, it soon prevailed in the country and today is still very much loved by modern people. This poem also brought fame to the Guanque Tower, which later has been honoured to be one of the 'Four Famous Ancient Chinese Towers' (the other three are the Tengwang, Huanghe (Yellow crane) and Yueyang towers).

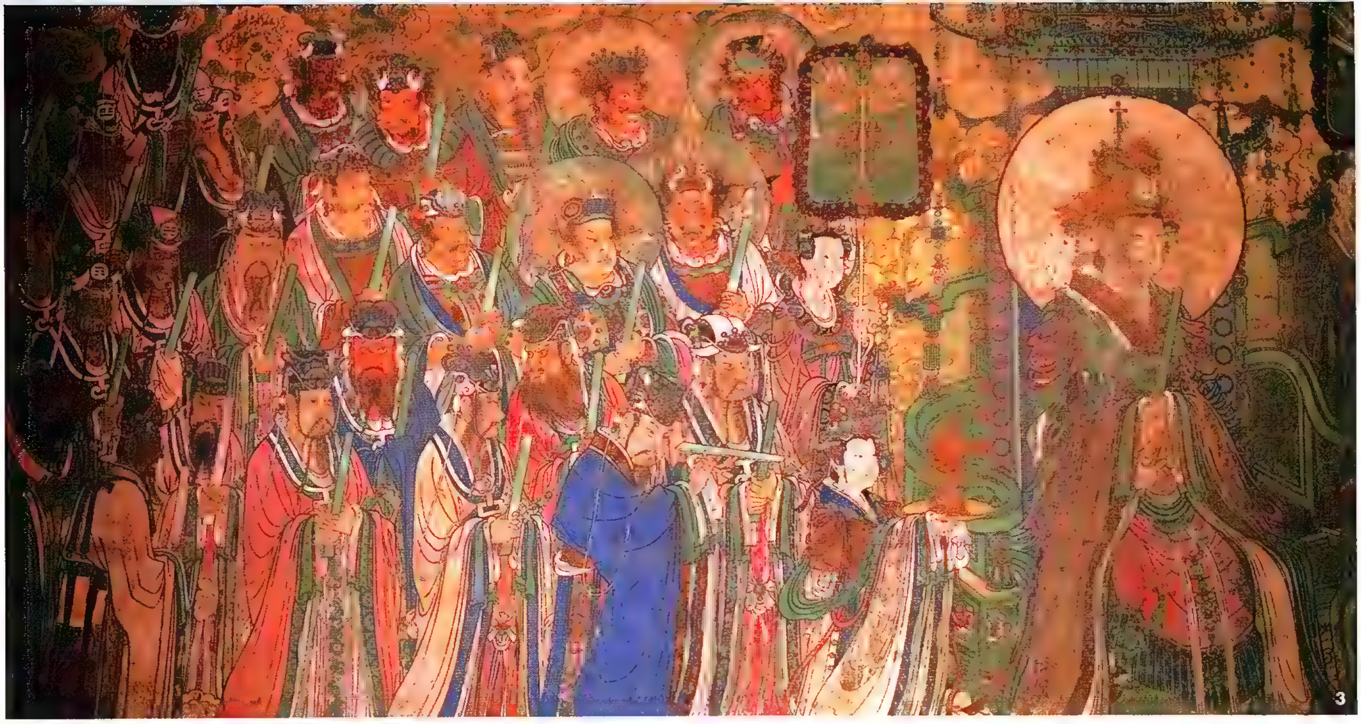
1. Along with the Huanghe, Yueyang and Tengwang towers, the Guanque Tower has been honoured to be one of the four famous ancient Chinese towers.

2. Tourists like to take pictures with the bronze statue of Wang Zhihuan, a Tang Dynasty poet, when they ascend the tower.

3. The Yongle Palace is the largest Taoist temple complex of the Yuan Dynasty in China and renowned for its murals. The murals rival those of the Dunhuang Grottoes in terms of artistic value.

4. Lü Dongbin's statue enshrined in the Chunyang Hall.

Admission: 50 yuan (Take a special-route bus at the Yongji Train Station.)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Yongle Palace

Lü Dongbin's Taotist Temple

The Yongle (Everlasting Happiness) Palace, is a large-scale Taoist temple complex built for Lü Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals. As legend has it, in the late Tang Dynasty, Lü Dongbin devoted himself to the imperial examination and failed many times. One day he met the Immortal Zhong Liquan. Enlightened by the immortal, he gave up seeking for the official title and fame and became a hermit. He eventually mastered the art of immortality.

After Lü Dongbin achieved nirvana, people from his hometown built the Ancestral Temple of Lord Lü for him at his former residence. It was expanded into a Taoist temple. In the Yuan Dynasty, Lü was worshipped as one of the five northern founders of the Quanzhen Sect of Taoism. He eventually became one of the eight Taoist immortals.

The Entire Taoist Temple Was Moved

The Yongle Palace was built by Qiu Chuji's (1148 — 1227, a famous Quanzhen-Sect Taoist) two disciples. The project stretched from 1247 to1358. It took some 110 years to finish, almost the entire Yuan Dynasty. It was located in Yongle, Ruicheng County, thus the name Yongle Palace. In addition to the Changchun (Everlasting Green) Palace in Beijing and the Chongyang Palace on the Zhongnan Mountain in Shaanxi, the Yongle Palace became one of the three greatest founding places of the Quanzhen Sect of Taoism of the time. In 1958, due to the need to store water in the Sanmen Gorge along the Yellow River, the Yongle Palace, which stood in the flood plains, was moved to its present location. It took seven years to move and restore the palace. It is now the best preserved Taoist temple complex of the Yuan Dynasty in China.

Admission: 30 yuan (Take a motor tricycle from the Ruicheng Long-distance Bus Station. The tricycle ride costs 4 yuan.)

The Most Valuable Cultural Piece

The first building you'll see after entering the palace gate is the Longhu (Dragon and Tiger) Hall. The mural Immortals' Pilgrimage to the Original Divinity (Chao Yuan Tu) on the walls around the statues is the most valuable piece of art in the Yongle Palace. At 4.26 m high and 95 m long, the mural was drawn by Ma Junxiang and other painters from Luoyang in Henan Province in 1325. On the mural there are 286 immortal figures, including eight main figures dressed like emperors, two deities of Black-Dragon and White-Tiger Constellations, 32 Heavenly King's guardians, boy and girl attendants, and heavenly warriors. With a superb theme, design and painting skills, it is a showpiece of the essence of China's traditional paintings.

The murals of the Yongle Palace, influenced by the painting styles of the Tang and Song dynasties, provide important material for research on the Yuan Dynasty's mural art and Tacism.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

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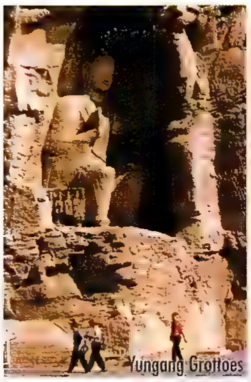
How to Get to Shanxi


Yungang Grottoes

Yungang Grottoes

Yingxian Wooden Pagoda

Jin Ancestral Temple

Mount Hengshan

Jin Ancestral Temple

Pujiu Temple

Hanging Temple

Hanging Temple

Transportation

Air: Shanxi has four airports, in Taiyuan, Datong, Changzhi and Yuncheng. All are convenient to the majority of the cities in central, south and north Shanxi. The Taiyuan Wusu Airport is 18 km from downtown and a taxi ride from there to downtown is about 30 minutes. It runs direct flights to more than 30 cities in China. But there are few international routes, so international visitors have to transfer from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Xi'an, Shanghai or Beijing.

Railway: Within Shanxi, the south-north railway is the Datong-Puzhou Railway and the east-west ones include the Shijiazhuang-Taiyuan and Beijing-Baotou railways. They cover the major tourist attractions in Shanxi.

Highway: Shanxi's highway network is shaped like the Chinese character '人' and connects central, south and southeast Shanxi. It starts at Datong in northwest Shanxi and runs south along the Dayun (Datong-Yuncheng) Highway and splits at Taiyuan. One branch continues southwest through Linfen, and Yuncheng to Sanmenxia in Henan Province and Tongguan in Shaanxi Province; the other one heads southeast through Changzhi, and Jincheng to Luoyang and Jiaozuo in Henan Province. It takes about three hours to drive from Taiyuan to any other city in Shanxi.

There are several long-distance bus stations in Taiyuan City proper, and these run different routes. The Taiyuan Long-distance Terminal Bus Station is located on the east side of the Wuyi Square on Yingze Street and 500 m west of the Taiyuan Train Station. It mostly runs bus routes to other provinces. Tel.: (351) 412 9993 Jiannan Long-distance Bus Station located at No. 447 Jianshe Road South, operates the buses to south and southeast Shanxi.West Long-distance Bus Station of Taiyuan located 500 m west of the Nanneihuan Bridge, operates the buses to Lüliang.East Long-distance Bus Station of Taiyuan located on Wulongkou Street, operates the buses to Mount Wutai.

Distance between Major Cities and Scenic Areas

Taiyuan → Linfen: 339 km
Taiyuan → Yuncheng: 422 km
Taiyuan → Datong: 450 km
Datong → Hanging Temple: 80 km
Datong → Yingxian Wooden Pagoda: 120 km
Yuncheng → Yongle Palace: 100 km
Yuncheng → Linfen: 120 km
Yuncheng → Pujiu Temple: 75 km
Yuncheng → Guandi Temple: 40 km
Linfen → Guangsheng Temple: 50 km
Linfen → Yuncheng: 160 km

When is a Bed not a Bed?

Photo Courtesy of CNN
Article by Richard Quest

There was a bit of good news for travellers recently when United Airlines, one of the world's largest carriers, announced it would go fully flat bed in business class. You could hear the cheer resounding from frequent flyers like me! This decision put paid, once and for all, to the rubbish that all beds on planes are equal.

A question: when is a bed not a bed? When it is angled lay flat. My back hurts, my legs ache and my clothes are all rumpled — and all because the airline, which claimed to have a bed, actually offered up a torture machine which I prefer to call a slide.

You know the ones; when you put the 'bed' into the full recline, you end up on a steep angle. Over the next few hours you slowly, but inexorably, slide down until you are on the floor with your underpants under your armpits.

The trend of moving from seats to beds began in 1995 when British Airways became the first carrier to install fully flat beds in business class. Its major British competitor, Virgin Atlantic, followed, and so began 'The battle of the beds'.

The problem became immediately clear — going fully-flat meant taking up a lot of room on the plane (valuable real-estate in the language of the airlines). As a result, individual airlines have patented their own ways of doing this. BA has alternate rear facing seats while Virgin adopted a fish-bone style, with seats off centre to the plane.

And then there were the airlines that decided not to bother spending the money and instead concocted a cheaper alternative — the dreaded angled lie flat seat. Sure, the seat goes flat but it is not horizontal. You end up sleeping on a slope.

Airlines that should have known better (including Lufthansa and Swiss) went for this cheaper option. The airlines justify the angle by saying the plane flies at a slight incline so you are really flat after all. How many ways can I say that this is rubbish? Let's be honest. These angled 'beds' are uncomfortable and almost never offer a good night's sleep unless you are so tired you would sleep on the floor.

Thankfully, the days of the angled lie flat are inevitably coming to an end. Last month's decision by United Airlines to become the only US carrier to 'go fully flat' almost certainly sounded the death knell for the horrible angled contraption in the years ahead.

If you are not sure what sort of bed you are about to suffer, let me give you some tips. First, ignore all the advertising the airlines put out on this. Do your own research and find out exactly what sort of bed is being offered. I always look at flatseats.com. It will tell you clearly what sort of seat it is and whether other passengers have found it comfortable.

If you do end up trapped with an angled lie-flat seat, I recommend that you recline the seat as fully as possible, THEN start nudging it back up again which actually will make the seat more flat. That will give you support and protect your back and legs. Eventually you will get to a position you can live with for the flight.

In the end, I would always go for Flat Bed over angled lay flat. It's a simple choice. A good night's sleep or a night spent sliding to the floor. Let's get rid of the angled torture trap for business travellers once and for all.

Richard Quest is a CNN anchor and correspondent based in London. He also hosts half-hour programme 'CNN Business Traveller' every month. For more programme details and schedule go to www.cnn.com/businesstraveller

Seeking the Roots

An Eco Cultural Exploration to the Source of the Yellow River

Photos & Article by William Ng et al.

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Reputed to be the 'mother river' of China, the Yellow River originates from the Yoigilangleb River Basin, 4,500 m above sea level on the north slope of the Bayan Har Mountains. Like an artery, it rumbles east through Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan and Shandong provinces and autonomous regions into the Bohai Sea. The nation has a strong bond with the river and its torrential currents that have run through ages. It stands as a silent witness to the ups and downs of the Chinese in six thousand years of history.

Twenty years ago, photographer William Ng set out on foot to the source of the Yellow River for the first time. Being Chinese, he felt he had gained some fulfilment in life by getting so close to the source of the 'mother river.' With this background, he came up with the idea of leading young people to this area to experience in person the source of the Yellow River in the hope that they would come to know about the grandness of the Yellow River and understand the values of nature conservation and Chinese culture.

Ten years ago, he planned an alternative activity for celebrating the return of Hong Kong to China — a scientific expedition. He led a group to erect the 'Monument of the Return of Hong Kong to the Motherland 1997' on the Cuowagaze

Mountain in the source region of the Yellow River. He aimed to help young people to search for their Chinese identity through concrete actions.

Help Youngsters Feel Their Chinese Identity

Ng was worried that the younger generation preferred material pleasures. He supposed they lacked a sense of environmental protection and was gradually losing interest in Chinese history and culture. In this context, he started to plan another significant expedition to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to China. He would lead a group of young people from Hong Kong and Mainland China deep into Bayan Har Mountains, 5,200 m above sea level in the source region of the Yellow River and erect another monument of 'Thinking of the Source while Drinking Water, Bonding to Family and Homeland in the Hearts'. The event was intended to arouse their 'sense of environmental protection' and stimulate their 'bond to family and motherland.'

In the name of the Amazing Youth Association (China), Ng wrote to the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Donald Tsang and Secretary for Home Affairs Bureau Tsang Tak-sing to invite them to be honorary sponsors. He also invited the Legislative Council members to become consultants. He sent off sixty letters altogether.

Miracles Came......

Unfortunately, only one week before the journey there was still not enough funding. The expedition to the source by young people might have had to be cancelled, but just when everyone was becoming disheartened, miracles began to happen, one after another.

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Ng suddenly received a cheque from Mr. Chan Yim-kwong, the Director of the World Salt and Light Charitable Foundation. He agreed to sponsor the activity at this critical moment.

The expedition thus commenced as planned. The party of 23 members, whose ages ranged from the 7 to 50, and education backgrounds from primary school, to doctoral candidate, and university lecturer, set off towards the source of the Yellow River. The exploration of the natural ecosystem of the region and of Chinese culture would last 19 days.

From 29 July to 16 August 2007, this group of people from Hong Kong, Hainan, Shaanxi and Qinghai gathered together. They had a tough but unforgettable journey.

Journey starts in Guangzhou

We, nine members from Hong Kong joined the Hainan group in Guangzhou. We visited Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Memorial Hall, which honoured the forerunner of the contemporary revolution of

1. In front of the mounment, 'Thinking of the Source while Drinking Water'.

2. Ten years ago, Ng initiated the erection of the 'Monument of Return of Hong Kong to Motherland 1997' on the Yak Skull Monument Mountain in between the twin lakes. Ngoring Lake is in the background.

3. The torrential and pounding Hukou Waterfall

4. The road to the source of the Yellow River was poor. People and jeeps had to push through the rivers from time to time.

1

China. Afterwards, we visited the Tomb of the 72 Revolutionary Martyrs at Huanghuagang, who died in an uprising led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen against the Qing government in 1911.

Then we went to Xi'an. The upright and steep ramparts of the ancient capital looked all the more aloof and lofty at sunset. The current remains were from the Ming Dynasty (1368 — 1644), retaining an elegant air with a bold touch of the prosperous and strong Han (206 B.C. — 220) and Tang (618 — 907) dynasties.

Lintong had been an unknown small town until the mausoleum of Emperor Qinshihuang (259 B.C. — 210 B.C.), the first emperor in Chinese history, was unearthed. The mausoleum, built with all resources of an empire for a single person, is massive. The famous terracotta warriors and horses excavated continue to amaze visitors.

On the central Shaanxi plain, a famous historical site, the Yellow Emperor Mausoleum, has attracted the attention of Chinese people throughout the world. Located in Huangling County in the south of Yan'an, the Yellow Emperor Mausoleum is the resting place of the legendary paramount ancestor of the Chinese, Yellow Emperor Xuanyuan.

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Hukou to Lanzhou: The Real Journey Begins

Hukou (literally, kettle mouth) Waterfall is located between Ji County of Shanxi and Yichuan County of Shaanxi. It was the high water period of the Yellow River when we arrived. A substantial volume of water thundered and converged from a 500-m wide riverbed to a 30-m wide channel and then plunged from a 30-m high cliff. It was a spectacle dramatized by rumbling sounds, massive force and water a reddish brown colour.

The section from Hukou to Lanzhou was the real beginning of the journey to the source of the Yellow River. Lanzhou is an important industrial city in the upper reaches. The dense haze that overshadowed the city showed the consequence of serious environmental pollution and the ghastly price of modernization. Compared with the section of the Yellow River in Hukou, the section in Lanzhou was tame. It lays quietly in the arms of Lanzhou, enjoying fine sunshine. Mantee, an observant member of our group, compared the data of sand content and found that the content in the Lanzhou section was apparently lower than that of the Hukou section. It proved that the soil erosion by water in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and the Hetao (the Yellow River loop) area after the Lanzhou section was serious.

Though Xujiashan in the north suburb of Lanzhou is named 'forest park', its vegetation diversity and density of foliage was far lower than that in south China. Due to sparse rainfall and high evaporation, farming relies on artificial irrigation from the Yellow River. The staff told us that it took six relays of water-carrying from the Yellow River before the water reached the top of the mountain.

The annual amount of irrigation water required was about 500,000 tons.

One of the most important hydraulic hubs in the upper reaches of the Yellow river, Liujiaxia Hydroelectric Power Station is about two hours drive away from Lanzhou. The massive body of green water in front of us was a stark contrast with the desolate surroundings. During the water reserving period of the dam, the velocity of flow was slow. The water of the Yellow River after full sedimentation retained its original colour and nature, emerald green and mirror flat. The green, glass like lake surface was nestled in endless ranges of mountains.

The Declining Eco Development

Xining, capital of Qinghai Province, is alternatively known as the 'Summer Capital', meaning that it is a summer retreat. The implication of the name was true in reality. According to our itinerary, we would rest in Xining for two days and arrange equipment for the highlands. After two hours drive, we arrived at the former site of the first nuclear weapon research and development base 'Nuclear City Patriotic Education Base.' The base exhibited the pictures and articles of scientists and young people who exemplified lofty ideals and ambitions. They dedicated their passion and youth to the development of nuclear technology for the country. However, our topic for discussion became the question, 'Was having a nuclear bomb really necessary?' If the resources were diverted to environment protection, we believed that we would contribute even more to mankind.

We continued south and passed the Heka Pass at 3,900 m above sea level. As the altitude rose, the traffic on the highway grew less. Seen from a high standpoint, our bus must have looked like a lonely traveller, trudging on the highland. In the following days we traversed this picturesque landscape.

If we hadn't read the roadside signboard, we would never have known that the town was the county seat of Madoi (瑪多), one of the richest counties in the country in the 1980s. Two T-shaped streets formed the main layout of the county seat. The street was so quiet and displayed none of the usual boisterous traffic and street markets. The passers-by in traditional Tibetan costume were few. Their tanned skin showed the intensity of ultraviolet

1. By the riverside near Bing-ling Monastery Grotto, the peaks are marvellously beautiful.

2. The jeep is stranded in mud on the way to the source.

3. Gyaring Lake, the largest lake in the source region of the Yellow River, reveals a spectacular scene.

3

1.Pouring clear water at the source of the Yellow River into the bottle.

2.The group members and drivers loading the monument which will be erected at the Source of the Yellow River.

3.Nomads in the Yoigilangleb River Basin in the upper reaches of the Yellow River.

radiation was strong in this region. There were few shops. The front gate and signboard of China Telecom looked conspicuous. The Internet cafe surprised us and showed that Madoi was not cut off completely from the outside world. We stayed overnight at the Communications Hotel, a new hotel in the county seat.

Our motorcade contained six jeeps and 23 members. Leaving Madoi, we entered an endless expanse of grassland.

Twin Lakes at the Source

Going further west, we saw Ngoring Lake, one of the twin lakes at the source region of the Yellow River, in the distance. The Yellow River originates from Kariqu River, passes by Sungsuk Sea and reaches the Ngoring Lake. Blocked by the Bayanlangma Mountain and Cuo'erduoze Mountain, the Yellow River gives birth to Gyaring Lake, the first large lake in the source region. After pausing for a while in the lake, the Yellow River disperses from the marshy land in southeast of the lake, into a web of waterways. It flows through ten Yellow River valleys before it reaches the second large lake, Ngoring Lake. The twin lakes are the largest freshwater highland lakes in the source region. Ngoring Lake, meaning 'blue long lake', blurred the horizon in between the blue sky and the blue lake. If there were no clouds, it was hard to tell the lake surface apart from the sky. Occasionally mani stone mounds occurred on the slope by the lakeside. At these mounds, the Tibetan drivers would stop the jeeps instinctively, get out and walk around them, chanting scripture, throwing *fengma*, or coloured papers printed with scriptures, into the sky and praying for peace and safety. Gyaring Lake is located 20 km to the west of Ngoring Lake. Stretching out in the east-west direction and flattened in the north-south direction, Gyaring Lake resembled a beautiful sea shell that adorned the upper reaches of the Yellow River.

Mounment of Soul and Spirit

Leaving the twin lakes we saw a huge yak skull on the Cuorigaze Peak between the Gyaring and the Ngoring lakes. It was the Yak Skull Monument, a symbol of the soul and spirit of the Chinese. The monument was made from a copperplate mould. The style of the monument was unique. It symbolised the long history and the diligent, plain qualities of the Chinese. People believed that the yak, a sacred totemic object, highlighted the lofty and strong spirit of the Chinese with the coarse, tough and powerful shape of the horns. The 'Monument of Return of Hong Kong to Motherland 1997' in a round shape, which symbolised the solidarity of the Chinese, stood by the side of the Yak Skull Monument.

Some remains of walls and human settlement were left by the Ngoring Lake. We were told they were the houses of the nomads before they moved away. A few years before, the area suffered from a deterioration on its grassland due to excessive grazing. Without nomads and livestock, the empty highland had become an uninhabited place. Yet some primitive residents stayed put. Sokhor, a kind of highland rodent, lived in the underground maze throughout the year and fed on grass roots. The land near the mouse holes became exposed as the grass was eaten. The bare land was easily washed away by rainwater.

The biggest crisis was caused by higher temperatures. In recent years, the global temperature has kept rising and seriously impacted on the highland. The figures provided by Qinghai Province proved this point. In over 40 years since 1961, the annual average temperature in the San Jiang Yuan (the source region of three rivers) region rose by 0.32°C, while the rainfall dropped by 13.9 mm in every decade. The reduction of rainfall means a worsening drought in the source region of the Yellow River.

Madoi (麻多) is the township seat nearest to the source of the Yellow River. It had only one street and one satellite phone to connect it to the outside world. Most of the Tibetans there could not speak Chinese. When we tried to make conversation with them, their standard reaction was an uncomplicated big smile. Interestingly, our youngest members played 'football' with some local children using an empty mineral water bottle. Their happiness manifested the motto 'Sport is the best way to communicate'.

After Madoi Township, the road condition was very poor and we had to slowly crawl along. At 10 pm, we finally discerned the light of Huangheyuan (Source of the Yellow River) No. 1 Primary School, our desitination. On the dark grassland, the distant mountains and the glistening stars provided a beacon of hope and kept us moving.

The Big Day

12th of August was the day to erect our monument. Everyone was excited. Ng stayed up through the night writing his speech. At dawn he set off to take pictures of the sunrise. As we had hoped the day was fine and sunny.

We arrived at Kariqu River in the source region after an hour's drive from the primary school. There were neither pounding waterfalls, nor spectacular highland lakes in deep valleys. Only a small spring gushed from the grassy slope, however, flowing quietly down the slope. A few monuments were scattered on the slope behind the spring. The largest one was a square stele with the inscription of 'Huangheyuan' (Source of the Yellow River) placed by Jiang Zemin, the former president of China. There was a newly built row of stupas in a close distance. A few white dots, the tents of nomads, could be seen from a distance.

With the help of our driver and other Tibetan

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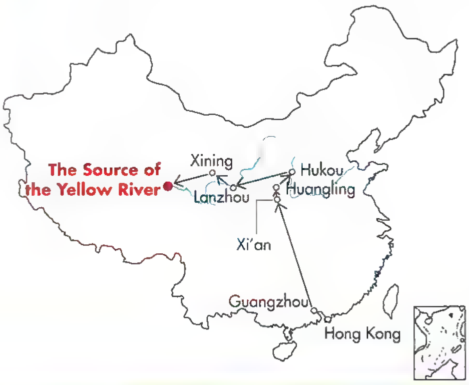
1. The group members erected a banner in front of the monument of 'Thinking of the Source while Drinking Water, Bonding to Family and Homeland in the Hearts' and started the monument-erecting ceremony.

2. The mother wants the child to know about the Yellow River and take him to its source.

helpers, the erection of the monument went smoothly. As the monument was too bulky, we could not move it easily with hands. However, everyone wanted to contribute to the task and the monument was placed, covered in mud from our labours. Shuk Tung, a younger member of the team, found a used glove, dipped it in the chilly water of the Yellow Water and scrubbed the mud off the monument. A yak skull and *Khatag*, a strip of raw silk or linen used for ritual greetings, were placed with solemn etiquette by the Tibetans. We erected two tripods brought from Hong Kong to hang a banner 10ft above the ground. The grand ceremony then began. Chi Ngai read out the statement of the significance of erecting the monument whilst Ng gave his speech which declared the wish of the mission. In the end we sang the theme song together to show our common wish, 'Waves of the Yellow River and waters of the Yangtze River are our blood. Seeking the source, searching for the roots. Thinking of China our homeland. Generation after generation, the Chinese culture is passed down...'

Translated by Zhang Boli



Teaching English at a Monastery in Tibet

Article by Sezgi

In May, 2007, when I was strolling along the narrow streets of the Tibetan quarter in Lhasa, throwing curious looks onto several Tibetan tea shops, a man in his mid-thirties approached me with a smile commonly found on Tibetans. He invited me into a tiny tea shop, and the conversation I had with him determined my stay in Tibet for the next one week. This man is the brother of Tashi — the monk of Ganden monastery, and who in turn invited me to teach English at his monastery.

Every morning, the therapeutic chanting of the monk next room woke me gently. And there was only one reason to come out of my sleeping bag — it was Tashi himself, who would softly knock on the door at 6 am every day, and then prepare us a breakfast of butter tea and tsampa — roasted barley mixed with yak cheese.

The monks discussing scriptures

The author, taken on a mountain in Lhasa

Our classroom was in the quarter of an old monk who has been at the same monastery for 15 years and is now eligible to stay in a quarter with three rooms. He is also the English teacher-in-residence and speaks English more fluently than my monk students. He uses the same tiny classroom at nights as well to teach those monks who are willing to work more on their English.

'I know it is too small; you are probably used to teaching in bigger classrooms,' said the old monk, avoiding direct eye contact with me, perhaps thinking I would feel uncomfortable teaching here. As tiny as a rectangular matchbox with an iron stove and two mattresses on a mud floor, our classroom gave me hardly any space to move about but was the most humble it could get.

I sometimes sat on the mattress by the iron stove, and watch the monks practice speaking English in pairs. I listened to them carefully to later point out major grammatical mistakes but at the same time, I was lured into the silence around us, despite it sometimes being broken by the iron stove slowly gobbling the yak manure. Other times, I moved to the square white board hung loosely the white washed wall to write new vocabularies. The only board marker was hardly visible on the white board, which was big and wide enough to allow me to write four or five words at a time.

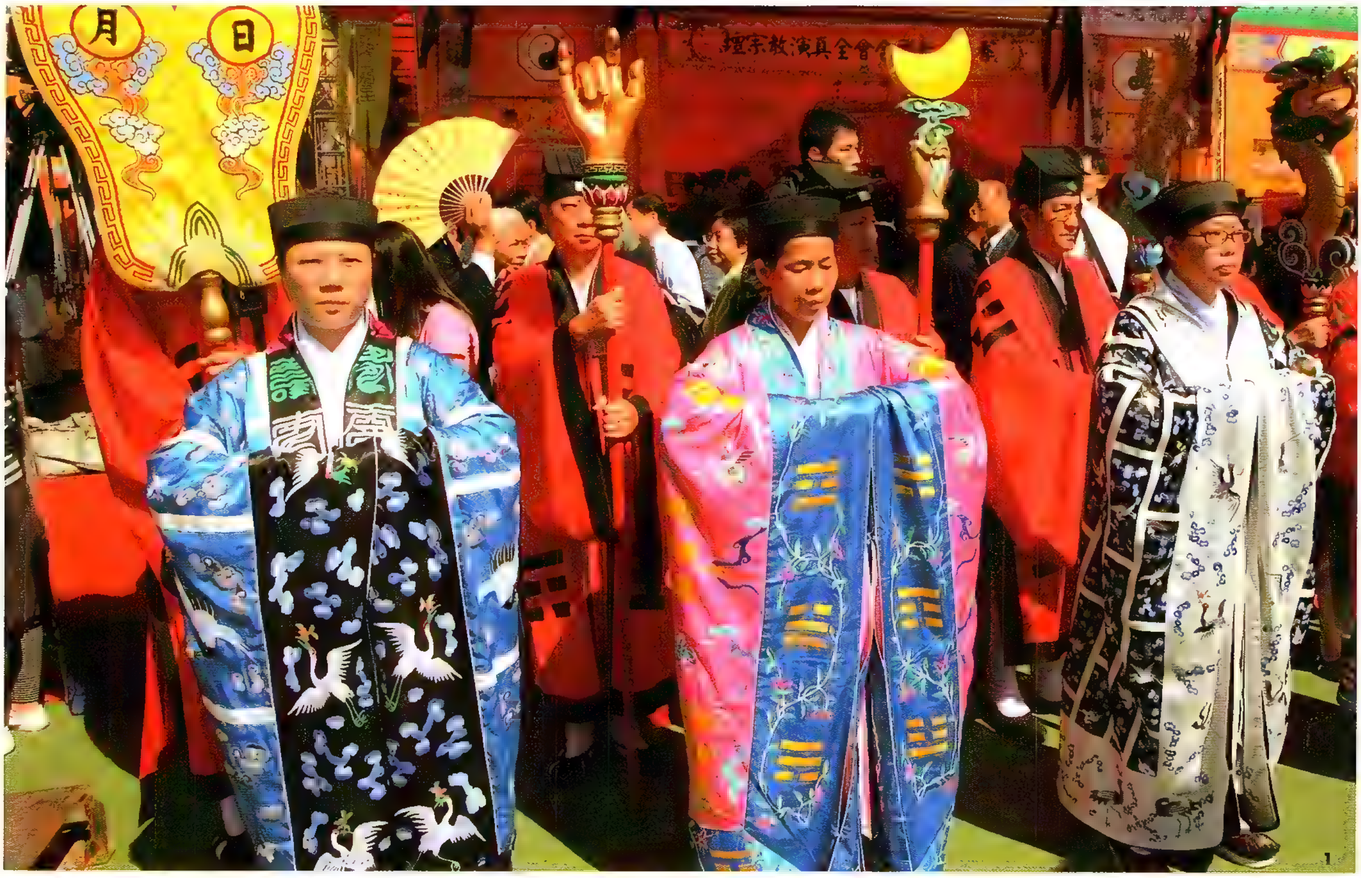
'Tibet is magical,' said one of the monks as he stood up to present his country during class. Other students got ready to note down any mistakes in his English. 'Buddhism is our way of life, and Tibetans are deeply religious people,' he continued, concentrating on pronouncing the words accurately and fully devoting his heart to the presentation of his beloved land and people.

'Our lives are simple,' he continued, briefly stopping to look into my eyes to see if I agreed. 'Simplicity is not only practiced in monasteries — it carries itself out into everyone's lives in Tibet.'

The word 'simplicity' instantly sent me back to my room in the monastery — one narrow bed, an alarm clock, several Buddhist prayer books on a colorful Tibetan chest, some postcards from Australia, the picture of the Monastery Lama, a small oven, a huge slab of yak meat dangling from the ceiling, Tashi's ceremonial robe and hat, and a bucket to carry water from the monastery well. 'These are all Tashi owns in life,' I reminded myself, 'and of course a heart of gold and a mind of steel as well.'

The voice of the presenter pulled me back to our classroom. 'Not only simple but strong, too — my people in Tibet,' he concluded his speech. 'As strong as your English,' I praised the presenter's language skills, encouraging everyone in class to applaud him.

A tiny damp classroom that may collapse in anytime, dim nights brightened by only a tiny electrical bulb or sometimes candles, and chilly nights warmed by solely yak manure... how strong a mind must be to spend two hours of hard work under these conditions to improve English, especially after a long relentless day of Buddhism studies and daily life chores at an altitude of 3,850 m.



Taoist Culture Unveiled by Mass Worship 'Luo Tian Da Jiao'

Photos & Article by Chen Tin Kuen

Many people's first impression of Taoism came from movies and novels telling stories of Heavenly Master catching ghosts or the magic Taoist power of Mt. Maoshan. Yet does Taoism, an almost 2,000-year-old Chinese religion, only possess these deity-related manifestations? Luo Tian Da Jiao, an unprecedented grand mass worship event, praying for the welfare of Mainland China, Hong Kong and the world was held last year by the Hong Kong Taoist Association at the Yuen Yuen Institute. This was intended to help people understand more about the true Taoist culture and principles through its solemn and time-honoured worshipping rituals.

Originating from the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, Taoism was founded by Zhang Daoling of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 — 220) and is an indigenous Chinese religion. Its concepts of Heaven (different from that of Christianity), destiny, ghosts and deities have been assimilated into Chinese culture over the passage of time. Many Chinese customs practiced today, such as making three incense offerings, bowing with hands folded in front, worshiping the Star God, and holding folk funeral rituals, all stem from Taoism. Yet very few people can understand their relationship with Taoism, which has been obviously neglected over the years.

Luo Tian Da Jiao, held from 10th to 24th November 2007, was the most important Taoist mass worship event in Hong Kong. In Taoism, 'Luo Tian' refers to the highest place among the 36

1. Masters from various Taoist temples attend the opening ceremony of Luo Tian Da Jiao in splendid attire.

2. Holding the Taoist staff, the Taoist master is dignified.

3. Master Ren Farong, President of China Daoist Association, came to Hong Kong to host the opening ceremony of Luo Tian Da Jiao.

4. Luo Tian Da Jiao held at the Yuen Yuen Institute was the most important Taoist mass worship event in Hong Kong.

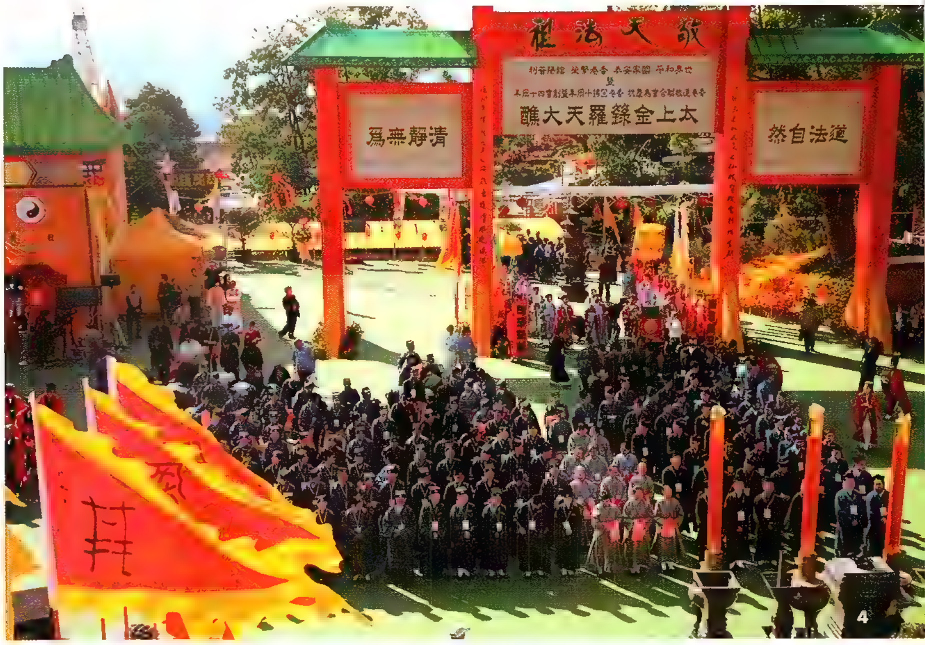
realms in Heaven where the deities live; 'Jiao' is a sacred ritual of praying for happiness and warding off misfortune. The Tai Ping Qing Jiao (the Bun Festival) held at Cheng Chau is one such kind of ritual that is most well-known in Hong Kong. But Luo Tian Da Jiao ranks much higher and last longer than ordinary local rituals, paying homage to 1,200 Taoist deities and having over a thousand Taoist priests participating. Luo Tian Da Jiao held in Hong Kong last year was so grand in scale that it was rarely seen in recent China.

The first time I saw the term Luo Tian Da Jiao was from the first chapter of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*, in which Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty (960 — 1279) ordered that a worshipping arena be built to invite all the deities from Heaven and Earth to exorcise evils and plague. So Luo Tian Da Jiao was used by sovereigns in the past to pray for blessings from Heaven. Such a special royal ritual later spread out to include the participation of the common people. In the Qing Dynasty (1644 — 1911), however, it gradually declined and even came to a halt after the founding of new China in 1949. It was not until 1993 that the ritual was resumed at the White Cloud Temple in Beijing.

Luo Tian Da Jiao held this year lasted for 12 days, with 37 participating religious organisations from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan regions, and Singapore, including both Chinese and foreign Taoist priests. This was the largest Taoist event unprecedented in Hong Kong's history.

The Six-Altar Layout

The spacious venue was newly built on the hill behind Yuen Yuen Institute that faces south. The characters 'Have respect for Heaven, learn from our ancestors' on the gate tower at the entrance was inscribed by Master Ren Farong (President of China Daoist Association), showing the theme of the event. At the venue a series of long stone steps lead from near the gate tower up to the elevation where five altars stood with the main one in the centre. Together with the one below the steps, the six altars in the east-west, north-south and upper-lower layout form a geometric shape, reflecting



1. A Master of a Taoist temple making a general offering to the deities on the last day of Luo Tian Da Jiao.

2. Three Taoist masters, as representatives of the Hong Kong Taoist Association, performing at the worshipping ceremony to pay homage to Taoist deities.

3. Among the Taoist masters coming to participate in the Luo Tian Da Jiao in Hong Kong were some foreign priests learning Taoism in the United States.

4. Master from the Maoshan Taoist Temple walking in eight-diagram steps in a sacred ritual.

5. When Taoist priests in colourful robes perform back and forth at the altars, holding ritual instruments, they seemed to be performing highlights from operas.

the Taoist belief in the natural order of subjects in the universe. Decorated with colourful flags fluttering under the blue sky, the whole venue was permeated with a religious atmosphere of a blessedness.

As Taoism is a polytheist religion, the six altars, except the main one, also enshrine different deities (of other religions) in various halls. Sub-altars are set up outside the six altars to worship Buddhas and Confucian sages. Other religious organisations were also invited to participate. This shows Taoism's great tolerance towards other Chinese religions.

Stories of Taoist deities have been the source of many literary works and fairy tales. Many famous Chinese classical novels, including *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *Journey to the West*, have a strong Taoist flavour. Their plots are made more dramatic by the appearance of deities and immortals. The contemporary martial arts novels by Louis Cha also mention Taoist figures, such as the martial arts wizard Zhang Sanfeng, adding to the reader's fantasy. Actually, Taoist culture has always been around us, without our noticing it.

Many have taken Emperor Yuhuang as the supreme deity in Taoism, but this again is a misunderstanding caused by films and novels. In fact the Sanqing, or the Three Pristine Lords, are the main and highest deities in Taoism. Sanqing, namely Yuqing, Taiqing and Shangqing, live in the three pure realms with the same names above the Heavens, each the domain of a deity. Among the six altars, the Central Altar represents the realms of Heaven and mainly enshrines Sanqing, together with the four imperial sovereigns (Emperor Yuhuang, Emperor Beiji, Emperor Tianhuang and Emperor Houtu), followed by 1,200 deities grouped according to different categories. This demonstrates the gigantically complicated pedigree of deities.

The set up of Hong Kong's Luo Tian Da Jiao was conceived by taking reference of ancient Taoist classics, as well as some traditional religious features of Guangdong. Province Folk deities commonly worshipped in Hong Kong — Guanyin, the Heavenly Queen, Lord Guan, Master Huang, and Che Gong — are all enshrined in the Taoist halls. Taoism develops by absorbing deities popularly worshipped among the people, and many historical figures have been deified and honoured on its altars. One can have a rough idea of the Taoist beliefs just by reading the plentiful names on the altar.

During the sessions, except for the opening ceremony, the second day's ceremony of revealing the 'Golden Rank' (a litany of good deeds performed by followers in furtherance of the Taoist cause), and the last day's general offering to the deities, all ceremonies on the six altars on other days were presided in turn by organisations of various places. Taoist ceremonial ritual has evolved by absorbing many folk religious practices, and the existing ones date back to the Tang (618—907) or Song (960—1279) dynasties. As different schools of Taoism differ in their understanding and development of the Taoist ritual, even the same ceremony may have different ritual presentations. Therefore, Luo Tian Da Jiao provides a good opportunity for laymen to appreciate a variety of performances by Taoist priests from different regions.

As the masters of ceremony performed back and forth on the colourfully decorated altars, holding ritual instrument as they chanted along the melody played by musical instruments, they looked as if they were performing the highlights from operas. Taoist rituals are sacred and serious, representing the communication between human beings and deities and passing a certain message. A ritual that combines music, dance, martial arts skills, art, folk custom and personal cultivation, is an epitome of Taoist culture.

Two Major Schools

The purpose of holding a Luo Tian Da Jiao is to pray for happiness and ward off misfortune, so there are rituals of praying for good fortune and of releasing deceased souls from purgatory, and these are both held separately during the day or at night.

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It is rather rare to watch the priests of the two Taoist schools — Zhengyi and Quanzhen — performing the Taoist rituals to their best abilities in the same venue. Among all these priests, those of the Zhengyi School from Longhu Mountain in Jiangxi Province and those of the Quanzhen School from Beijing's White Cloud Temple were the most eye-catching. Despite using different ritual scriptures, they are alike in Taoist concept.

Priests of the Zhengyi School are hired to

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1. Taoist masters entering the Sanqing Hall on the six altars.

2. The Taoist master consecrating with a vermilion pen and revealing the 'Golden Rank'.

3. A Taoist priest making incense offerings to each of the deities in the hall.

provide their services. Integrated into the local society, their rituals are compatible with the local customs and beliefs. They are known as Nanwu in Hong Kong, engaged mainly in providing services for funerals and participating in the Tai Ping Qing Jiao mass worship in the rural area of the New Territories.

The Quanzhen School advocates the principles of having a pure soul and few mortal desires, as well as establishing a system to become a priest. The school has rigid rituals which are strictly abide the traditional format. Most of the temples in Hong Kong follow this school, which promotes charity work and the combination of the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Yet, for historical reasons, Taoist priests of the Quanzhen School in Hong Kong do not live in temples.

Despite its history of being a British colony, Hong Kong as a modern internationalised city is still deeply permeated with the tradition of Taoist rituals. Hong Kong plays an indispensable role in funeral services and Tai Ping Qing Jiao mass worship in the rural area. Indeed it has become a Chinese religious practice widely accepted as a social custom. Nevertheless, there is a misunderstanding about Taoist rituals, regarding it as merely a form to exorcise evil spirits. In fact, the Taoist ritual contains elements of praying, confession, pardon, extrication and salvation, showing a multi-faceted traditional Chinese philosophy.

The purpose for the Hong Kong Taoist Association to spend over 10 million Hong Kong Dollars in organising Luo Tian Da Jiao this year is to pray for world peace and social stability of Hong Kong on the tenth anniversary of its handover to China. Also, it is meant to promote this indigenous Chinese religion so the general public can gain a better understanding of Taoist principles and beliefs.

Taoism is a carrier of China's religious culture, its rituals only a format to present Taoist culture. To fully understand Taoism, Laozi's Daodejing (Classic of the Path and Virtue) and knowing ways to preserve health are essential. Knowledge of its development, inheritance and changes can help us reflect on China's traditional life and religious practices.

Translated by Ling Yu

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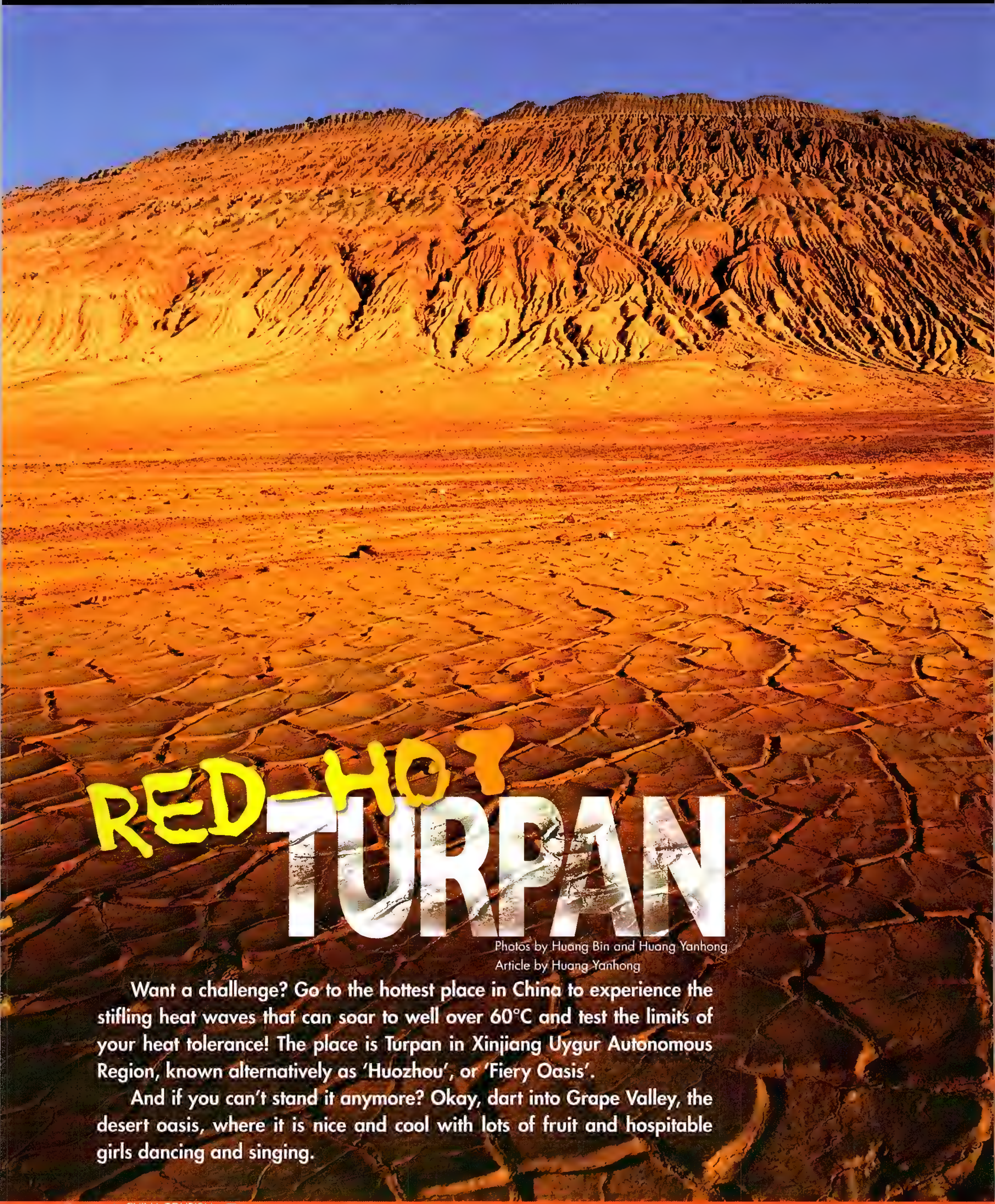


RED-HOT TURPAN

Photos by Huang Bin and Huang Yanhong
Article by Huang Yanhong

Want a challenge? Go to the hottest place in China to experience the stifling heat waves that can soar to well over 60°C and test the limits of your heat tolerance! The place is Turpan in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, known alternatively as 'Huozhou', or 'Fiery Oasis'.

And if you can't stand it anymore? Okay, dart into Grape Valley, the desert oasis, where it is nice and cool with lots of fruit and hospitable girls dancing and singing.

Turpan is the hottest place in China and has highest temperature recorded at its Flaming Mountain. The highest recorded air temperature in summer is 49.6°C, while the land surface temperature shoots to 70°C each year and in an extreme case, 82°C!

Extremes of Turpan

Turpan is a place of extremes — lowest altitude, driest weather, greenest trees, sweetest fruit and highest temperatures. It is also dualistic — desert and oasis, Flaming Mountain and grape vines. Its contrasts are striking, from bitterly cold to red hot, from withered and dry to green and luxuriant.

Walking around in the streets of Turpan, I found by accident a moving phone service cart; in fact, there's one about every 100 m or so. With a canvas top, the cart was equipped with 6 to 7 phones, and it also had an array of soft drinks. Each cart was more or less the same. I was surprised at first that two such different products were being sold together. Then it dawned on me that it was only natural to do so because of the heat. The customer would become thirsty after talking on the phone for a while in such a hot place, so a cool drink would surely come in handy.

60°C under Flaming Mountain

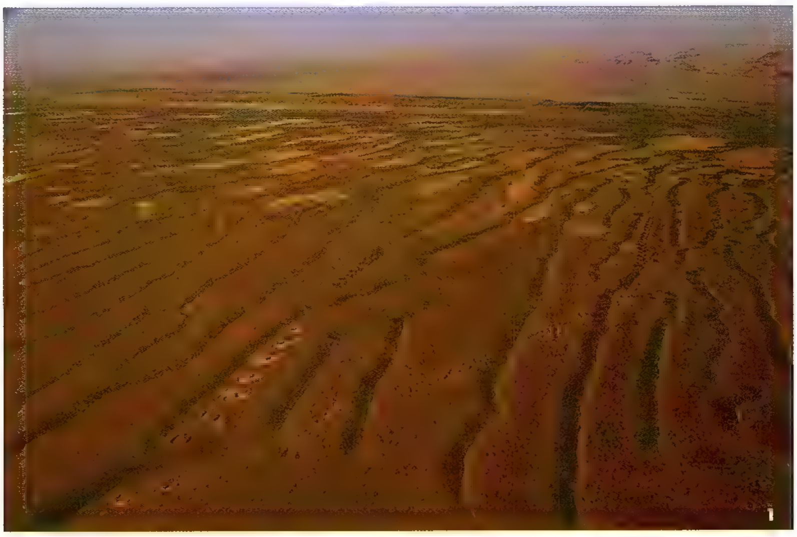
Flaming Mountain certainly lives up to its reputation. It is not an exaggeration to call it 'the furnace of fiery oasis'.

The car arrived at the base of Flaming Mountain and as soon as the door was opened, a wave of heat rolled in. The passengers were stunned, wondering whether to get out or not. The heat reminded me of a sauna — or even a steam basket!

Located on the northern rim of Turpan Basin, Flaming Mountain was named 'Red Rock Mountain' in ancient books. Roughly 98 km long and 9 km

1. The craggy face of Flaming Mountain is flaming hot. (by Huang Bin)

2. It is steaming hot in front of Flaming Mountain. Ancient people cooled themselves with a fan like this. (by Huang Yanhong)



wide, it looks like a huge red dragon spanning the basin. Its highest peak is 831.7 m.

Maybe they are masochists, but tourist groups visiting Flaming Mountain won't go there in the early morning or late afternoon, when it is cool. They go at about 3 pm when it is scorching. Once the tourists arrive, they have to muster up the courage to jump out of the car into the wave of heat. Looking up at the rod thermometer, they find the mercury has shot to above 60°C. Then come the complaints. They grumble, 'It's so hot!' The guide, though, takes it in his stride, 'Well, that's nothing — just 60. It can reach 82! Now that is hot!'

The huge mass of Flaming Mountain stood imposingly before us. The reddish brown mountain rose from the red rocky Gobi Desert. Exposed in the sunshine, the people and objects in the distance swayed in the rising heat. No trees, no grass, no birds… we had nowhere to hide. Staring at the mountain for a while, our eyes became sore in the heat. It seemed that even our tears were drying up.

Tourists are just human — of fresh and blood — not copper and iron like sculptures. Nobody dared to stay long outside. They were brave enough only to rush out from the air-conditioned car, take a few snapshots, take in the amazing landscape for a few minutes — and then rushed back into the car.

Karez Wells to Defy the Heat

As Turpan is so dry and hot, the Karez Wells, a series of underground water channels created to irrigate the area.

The annual rainfall in Turpan is a mere 3 mm. There would be no oasis of Turpan if it were not for the Karez Wells. The Karez Wells were dug at the time of the Han Dynasty (206B.C. — 220A.D.). People built underground irrigation channels by taking advantage of the natural slope, drawing the melted ice from the Tianshan Mountain 5,000 m above sea level to the basin 154 m below sea level. Over the millennia, the accumulated number of underground channels is surprising. There are over 1,000 underground channels in the region, altogether they amount to a total length of 5,000 km. What a colossal underground farming irrigation system!

The Karez Wells, the Great Wall and the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal have become China's three most famous ancient engineering projects. However, the number of the wells is shrinking now. They are

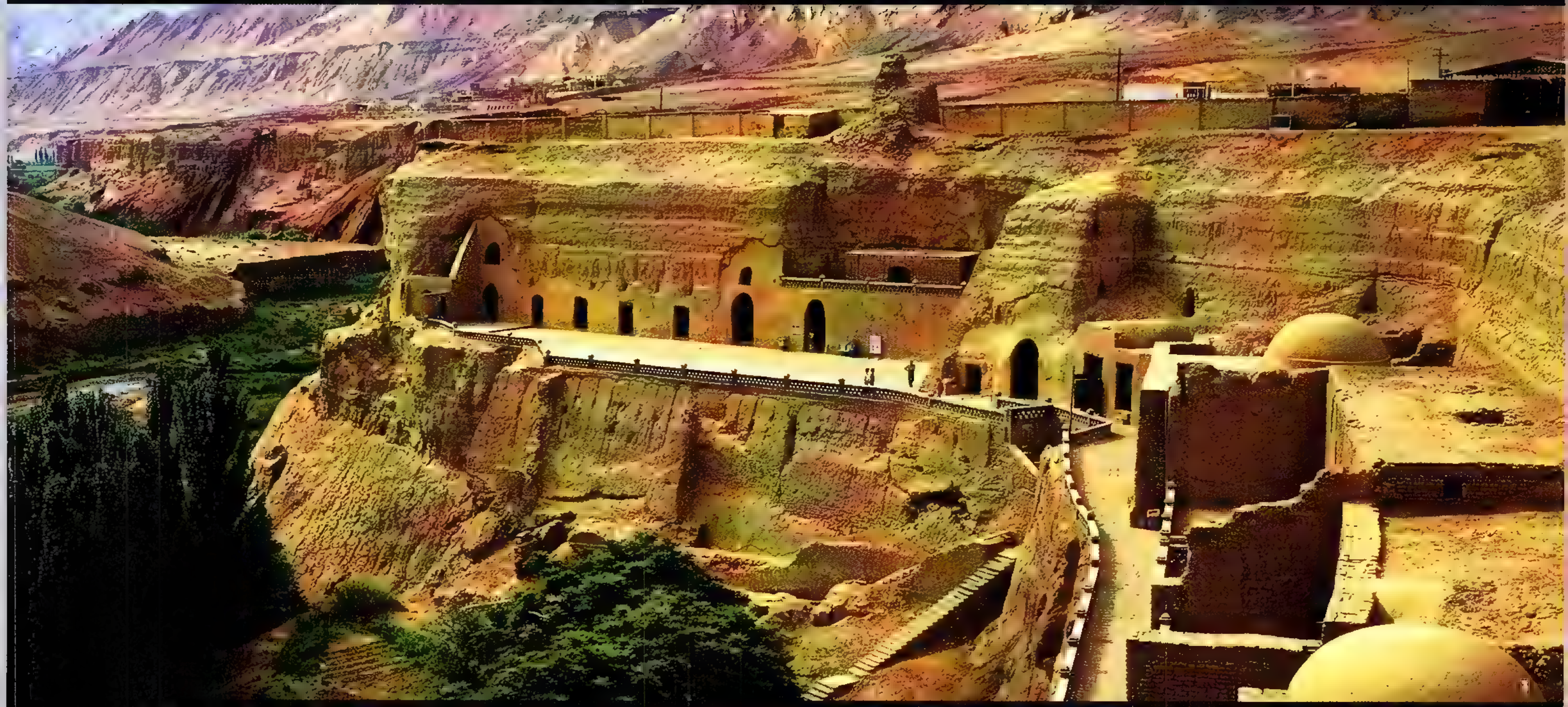
1. Looking with a bird's eye view, one can see the lines of the Karez Wells on the desolate Gobi Desert. (by Huang Bin)

2. Flaming Mountain is one of Turpan's must-see scenic spots. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. The arid and imposing Flaming Mountain has a unique shape. (by Huang Bin)

4. A thermometer in the shape of the huge gold-banded iron rod, weapon of the mythological figure, the Monkey King in the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West,* who had passed by the place, stands firm in the open space. The temperature has shot to 60°C. (by Huang Yanghong)

5. The Karez Wells channel the melted ice from the Tianshan Mountain to irrigate the farming fields. (by Huang Yanhong)

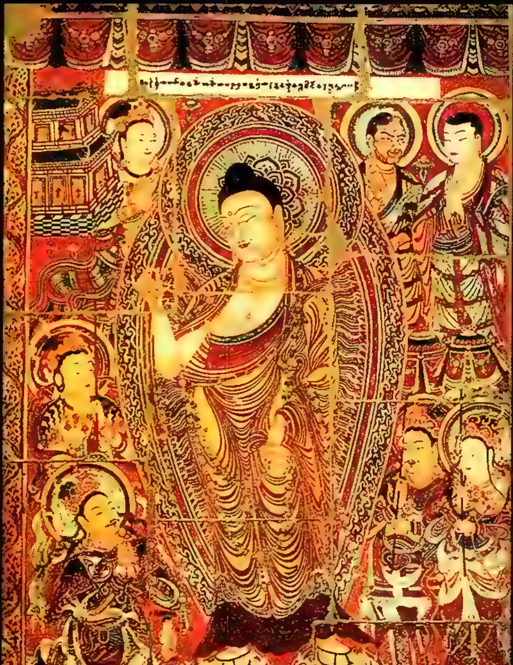


1. Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Grottoes were carved along the cliff of one side of Mutou Valley. (by Huang Bin)

2. The colours and shapes of the figures in the murals of the Thousand Buddha Grottoes are marvellous. (by Huang Bin)

3. Gaochang Ruins at the foot of Flaming Mountain. (by Huang Bin)

4. Donkey cart is the best way to go sightseeing at Gaochang Ruins. (by Huang Yanhong)



being replaced gradually with tap water.

The Karez Museum has been set up recently, conserving a section of the ancient 'underground engineering project'. A huge sand table in the museum explains the Karez system. Underneath the museum is one of the wells. The main body of the well lies deep underground, formed with a hidden channel, exposed channel, vertical well and a waterlogged dam. A sculpture of a barebacked Uygur man is digging with a ketman, a large hoe used by the Uygurs. There is a small oil lamp near it. In addition to lighting, the use of lamps guide the alignment of the wells. Three lamps in a straight line ensure a straight channel.

The Karez channels are of different lengths — 20 km for the long ones and 100 m for the short ones. The oldest well is called Tu'er Karez, and it is located in Zhuangzi Village, Qiatekale Township, Turpan. Of a total length of 3.5 km, Tu'er Karez can irrigate 20 mu (1 mu = 1/15 of a hectare) of land. It has been used for over 470 years.

The Thousand Buddha Grottoes

Once a cosmopolitan city on the Silk Road, Gaochang (or Qara-hoja in Uygur) Kingdom is used to be prosperous for 1,400 years. The Thousand Buddha Grottoes are a feast for the eyes of the weary travellers on the Taklamakan Desert. Shortly after I had entered Mutou Valley at Flaming Mountain, I found a wide stretch of greenery as if I were in Jiangnan, the flatland south of the Yangtze River known for luxuriant vegetation and water towns. At the bottom of the valley grow dense trees, with gurgling water flowing beneath. Dozens of grottoes lined on the arc of the cliff.

Although the Thousand Buddha Grottoes were once covered with stunning murals, with a total size of 1,200 sq. m, today we can see little. Pointing at the empty earth-brown wall of the grottoes, the guide recited fluently a description of the murals. These murals, about the 12 disciples of Tamo Monk, are lifelike; clearly our ancestors had attained masterly painting skills; in particular,

the pigment has been so strong that it does not fade away even after a thousand years — no one today knows how to make such pigment. Hearing about the murals has given us a deep respect for our ancestors.

Unfortunately, there is nothing left to see today, since the murals together with the walls have been truncated and stolen by a German, Albert von Le Coq (1860 — 1930), at the beginning of the 20th century.

Donkey Taxi at Gaochang Ruins

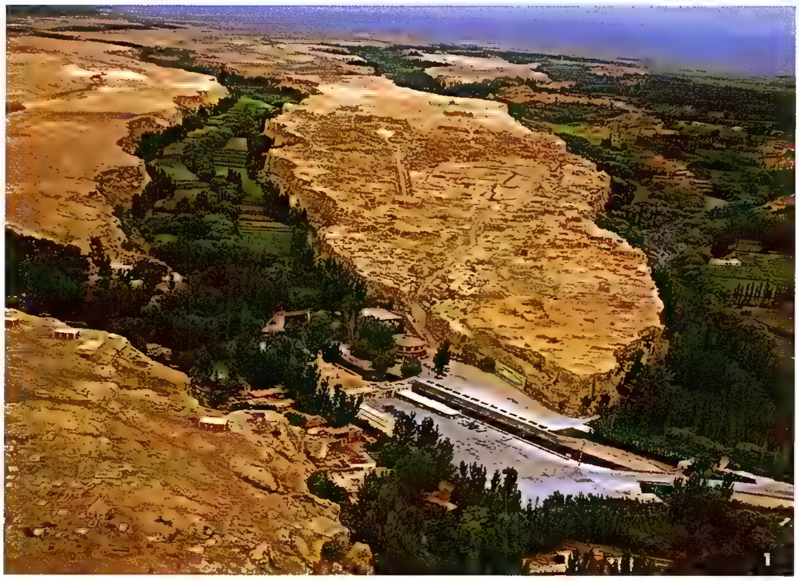
Located in Sanbao Township east of Turpan today, the Gaochang Kingdom was once an important city on the Silk Road. At its prime, the city state had a population of 30,000 laymen and 3,000 monks.

Initially built in the 1st century B.C., the Gaochang Kingdom was destroyed by a series of wars in the 13th century (late Yuan Dynasty). What we could see were the ruins of the city. Inside the city gate, a massive expanse of crumbling walls spoke quietly of the drastic changes that had taken place. The ruins consisted of the outer city, inner city and palace inside a perimeter of 5 km. The rampart of the outer city was tamped and well conserved. The southwest part of the city has been left with the largest number of ruins and relics. The contours of the temple, shrine and streets could still be discerned. The sutra hall where Xuanzang (a famous Buddhist monk of the early Tang Dynasty) preached in the past had been renovated. The circular construction without a dome is still in good condition today and it's famous acoustic qualities are still evident.

Donkey carts, available inside the city gate, were the only transportation tool inside for tourists. Almost without exception, tourists chose to take a donkey cart to cover the 6-km-distance. Arriving at its destination, the special taxi would stay for 20 minutes and return along the same route. It was equipped with a canvas top to block the blazing sun. The poor creature, the donkey, had to pull the loaded cart in the stifling heat. The cart drivers, mostly villagers from nearby, said the donkeys were used to the heat. After the place became a tourist spot, their lives were much improved. Over 30 donkey carts inside the ancient city work in shifts, once every two days.

Jiaohe Ruins at the Meeting of Two Rivers

Turpan boasts another set of ancient city ruins,



1. Overlooking Jiaohe Ruins, one sees a deserted site where two rivers join. (by Huang Bin)

2. At the Grape Festival, girls are dressed in colourful costumes typical of their ethnic group. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. The 'shade room' for the natural drying of grapes. (by Huang Yanhong)

4. The Jiaohe Ruins at night captured by long exposure shows a special charm. (by Huang Bin)

the Jiaohe Ruins, located 10 km west of Turpan on a willow-leaf-shaped peninsula of 1,650 m long and 300 m wide at most. Two rivers run along the peninsula and join — hence the name 'Jiaohe', literally 'joined rivers' in Chinese.

Of a total area of 250,000 sq. m., the ruins comprised a temple, government offices, stupas, civilian dwellings and workshops. Inside the city, most of the builders adopted the 'earth-digging wall building' architectural method, that is, digging earth on a high foundation to build walls. The walls were largely made of raw earth. For that reason, the remaining walls have been eroded by wind to show rugged edges. The whole city looks like a complex of ancient sculptures.

Jiaohe Ruins has become the oldest, best-preserved city built with raw earth construction in the world. Stepping into the Dongxiaosi Temple at the city centre, I found that scaffolding had been erected for renovation works. Technicians had inserted pipes into the cracks along the earth walls and pumped in glue. When the work was completed, the cracks could not be seen.

Technicians there were from the Cultural Relics Protection Centre of the Dunhuang Research Institute in Gansu Province. The project commenced in June and finished in November last year. Their work coincided with the scorching summer. I saw that each of the workers had red eyes and excessive inner heat due to the hot weather. They were not used to the weather. To cope with it, they would not work in the afternoon. Instead, during those periods, they stayed in the makeshift hut where the temperature rose to 42°C. They went off duty before 12 noon and resumed work at 5 pm.

The Sweetest, Crispest Grape Valley

The most intriguing place in Turpan was an area of green valleys close to Flaming Mountain: Grape Valley, Tao'er Valley, Mutou Valley, Tuyu Valley, Lianmuxin Valley, Subo Valley... they were networked with gurgling creeks and covered under dense foliage. They were heaven, compared with the blazing-hot Flaming Mountain. Among them, Grape Valley was the most typical. The grape-growing history of Grape Valley can be traced back 1,000 years. The sugar content of the grapes produced here is as high as 20~24%, and ranks No. 1 in the world. Turpan is literally the sweetest place in China. The Grape Valley is a must-see for any tourist to Turpan. It takes half an hour by car to arrive at the valley from downtown Turpan.

I was at the arid Gobi Desert moments before. Now I was in a green eden. Opening the window, I took a deep breath of the fresh, cool air. Seven km long and two km wide at its widest spot, Grape Valley runs along the south-north axis. Known for its abundance of quality grapes, the valley has an annual yield of 6 million kilograms of fresh grapes and over 300 tonnes of raisins.

Looking at the slope in the distance, I saw the densely dotted 'shade rooms'. They are rooms with meshed holes on all walls specially built to naturally dry the grapes. Clusters of grapes were hung on the wooden racks inside. The hot air runs through the holes and dries the grapes in a month. At the bottom of the valley, grape trellises, with crawling grape vines, formed long criss-crossing green corridors. Though it was not harvest time, I could tell different strains of grapes — mare-teat, rose-pink, Kashihar and rijiagan. The fresh, fleshy fruit was attractively within reach. Particularly, the seedless white grapes were well-known for their thin peels, tender flesh and sweet juice. The host soaked them beforehand in the melted ice water of the Tianshan Mountain. No one could resist such a temptation. By paying a little money, I had the fun of holding a tray and picking any cluster of grapes I liked.

Taking the first step into Grape Valley, I could feel the Uygur culture instantly. Young men and girls were dancing in front of us. To top it all, the host held a grape-eating competition, free of charge. The winner was given a prize. All participants forgot about their manners and tried to swallow as many as they could. In just a few minutes, the winner was singled out.

A Cool Evening Concert at Emin Minaret

At least there was some respite from the heat in Turpan. Once the sun set, the air cooled down. I visited Emin Minaret (Su Gong Ta), where an evening concert would be held.

Emin Minaret is a classic piece of Islamic architecture. Built in 1777, the minaret is a wide-based, narrow-topped cone of 37 m high. The whole construction was built with brown clay, decorated with a dozen different geometric patterns made from clay bricks. It showed a typical ethnic Muslim flavour and a strong cubical sense. Its most distinctive feature is conciseness.

The orchestral music '*Shadiyana*', a famous piece of Uygur folk music for happy occasions, commenced the concert. On the stage with the Emin Minaret as the setting, performers from the Uygur, Kazak, Russian, Mongolian and Han nationalities played the Uygur folk music masterfully in a symphony. They played famous Chinese and foreign pieces, which impressed the audience.

Magical Sand Therapy

A desert next to the city, an oasis alongside the sands — this remarkable scene is in Shanshan, Turpan.

The Kumtag Desert is the hottest desert in China. Sand therapy here is famous. With a history of over 1,000 years, it is an important Uygur medical treatment. The sand of the desert contains over ten microelements, including calcium, sulphur, phosphorous, iron and sodium. Sand therapy is a 'magic' cure for arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. After noontime when the sand

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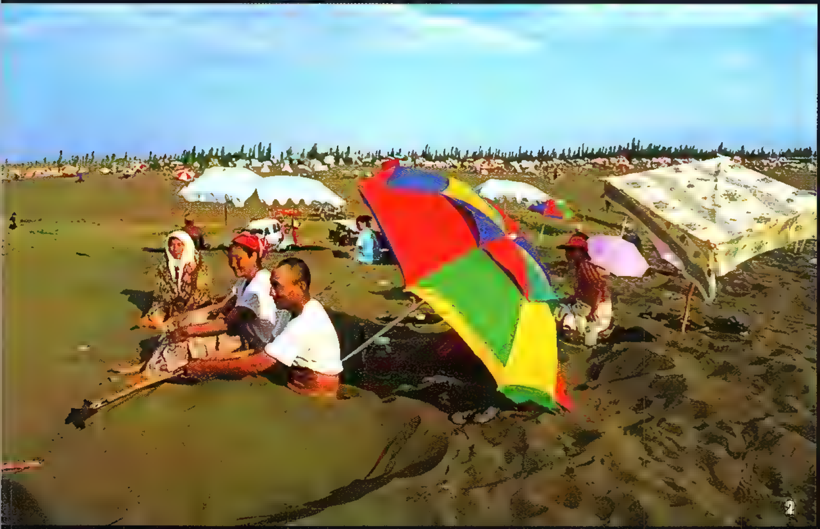


1. Modern symphonies are performed under Emin Minaret. (by Huang Yanhong)

2. Sand therapy is an ancient treatment for arthritis. (by Huang Bin)

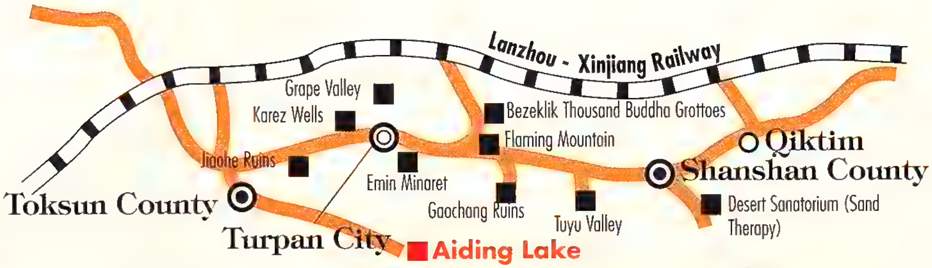
3. The sand sculpture at Shanshan Desert shows the spirit of the desert. (by Huang Yanhong)

temperature rises to 60°C, the therapy can start. Some people bring an umbrella, a teapot of saline tea, and a sand spade and climb to the top of the sand dune. They bury the ill part of the body in the sand.

Strangely, the patient will have a degree of this healing effect just by staying in such a hot and dry place without even going through the sand therapy. Before I visited Turpan, I had a sprained wrist for nearly a month. It had not recovered fully. On the third day after arrival, I found the swelling was gone and the pain had diminished. After another two days, I was surprised that the shoulder and elbow pain from which I had suffered for over a year had disappeared.

Translated by Zhang Boli

Travel Tips


Lanzhou - Xinjiang Railway
Grape Valley
Karez Wells
Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Grottoes
Flaming Mountain
Qiktim
Shanshan County
Jiaohe Ruins
Emin Minaret
Toksun County
Gaochang Ruins
Tuyu Valley
Desert Sanatorium (Sand Therapy)
Turpan City
Aiding Lake

Tourist Map of Turpan

Turpan Grape Festival on China's Silk Road

The Turpan Grape Festival on China's Silk Road is held to commemorate the 2,100 anniversary of the opening of the Silk Road. There have been 16 festivals since it was first held in 1990. The 17th Turpan Grape Festival will be hold from August to September this year. During the festival, such diverse and activities as the grand opening ceremony and thrilling performances such as a firework show, the Emin Minaret Music Festival, cross-country rally, Grape Gallery Good Food Festival, and international sand sculpture contest in Kumtag Desert kept visitors and locals alike thoroughly entertained.

Transportation:

Railway: There are a number of rail lines between Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and Turpan on the Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway. Of 143 km, this short trip takes over 2 hours. As one needs to take a bus from the Turpan Train Station to the county seat for another 1 hour, it is more convenient to take a bus directly from Urumqi to Turpan.

Highway: There are buses bound for Turpan at Santongbei Bus Station in Urumqi. The trip takes two and a half hours, and the fare is 33 yuan.

Turpan has quite a large number of scenic spots. To save time and money, it is best that a few people rent a car together and share the cost. Car rental is about 200 yuan per day.

Notes:

Turpan is very hot. The summer temperature can reach over 60°C. It is suggested to carry sun screen and take sunstroke preventive measures. It is absolutely necessary to bring a lot of drinking water on an outdoor trip to keep the body from becoming dehydrated.

Scenic spots:

Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Grottoes

Ticket: 20 yuan

Riding in a jeep in Kumutage Desert. (by Huang Bin)

Transportation: Take the bus to Shanshan or Sanbaoxiang at the Turpan Bus Station, and alight at Jinkou. Take a local passenger motor tricycle to Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Grottoes or hitch a ride there. A taxi to the site is about 50 yuan one-way.

Jiaohe Ruins

Ticket: 40 yuan

Transportation: The site is located 16 km west of downtown Turpan. You can take a tourist bus or hire a taxi to visit the place. The taxi fare is 10 yuan. You can also take Line 101 or 1 at the entrance of the Bus Station, and alight at Karez Folk Culture Park. After that, you can take a motorcycle taxi to the scenic spot.

Gaochang Ruins

Ticket: 20 yuan

Transportation: Take a bus to Shanshan at the Turpan Bus Station, alight at Shengjinri, and then take a motor tricycle to the ruins. Or you can take a bus to the Sanbaoxiang government offices at the Bus Station, and cover the last leg to the ruins by motor tricycle. Inside the ruins, donkey carts are available for visitors. Each charges 20 yuan.

Emin Minaret

Ticket: 20 yuan

Transportation: Take a bus to Qiatekale Township from Turpan and alight at the intersection of Emin Minaret. Then walk eastward for 5 minutes to arrive at the minaret. Taking a taxi there costs 10 yuan one-way.

Karez Wells

Ticket: 40 yuan

Transportation: The Karez Wells are 6 km from downtown Turpan. You can take a tourist bus to get there.

Grape Valley

Ticket: 60 yuan for five sightseeing spots

Transportation: Grape Valley is 11 km northeast of Turpan. Line 4 mini-bus to Grape Valley is available at the small square opposite Gaochang Department Store (Gaochang Zhonghe Shangchang).

Kumtag Desert

Ticket: 20 yuan

Transportation: Take a bus to Shanshan County from downtown Turpan. The desert is right by the side of the city.

Accommodation:

The hotels in Turpan all have grape vines or grape trellises. Turpan Hotel and Oasis Hotel are in Qingnian (Youth) Road, while Huozhou Hotel and Gaochang Hotel are near as well. Economical guesthouses are all over the city. The rates for guesthouses range from 25 to 50 yuan. For example, Liangmao (Foodstuff Trade) Guest House is 25 yuan a night. You can also stay in Grape Mansion, a 2-star hotel, in Grape Valley.

Grand Turpan Hotel

Address: No. 20, Gaochang Road, north of People's Square, Turpan

Tel.: (0995) 855 3668 / 8553918

Room rate: 230 yuan / room

Turpan Jiaotong Hotel

Address: No. 230, Laocheng Road West, Turpan

Tel.: (0995) 853 1159 Room rate: 180 yuan / room

Turpan Hotel

Address: No. 1695, Qingnian Road South, Turpan

Tel.: (0995) 856 8898 Room rate: 200 yuan / room

Turpan Ka [illegible]

Address: No. 888, Xincheng Ximen Village, Xincheng Road, Turpan

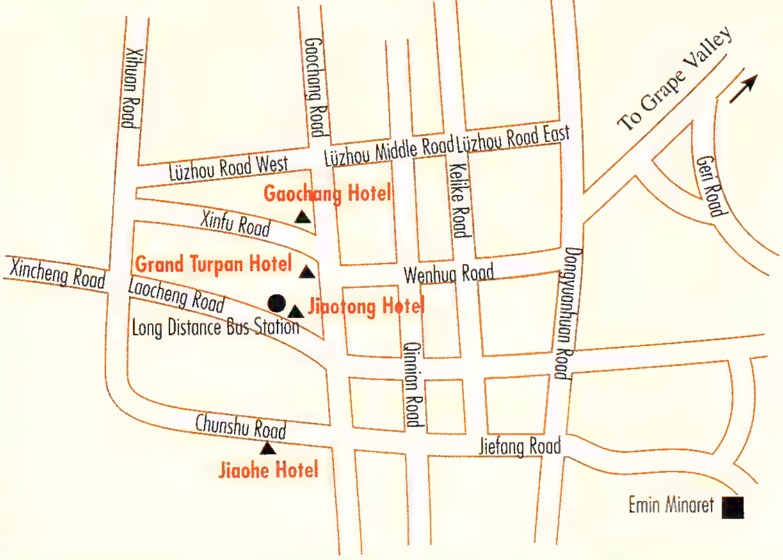
Tel.: (0995) 855 7206 Room rate: 150 yuan / room

Turpan Huozhou Hotel

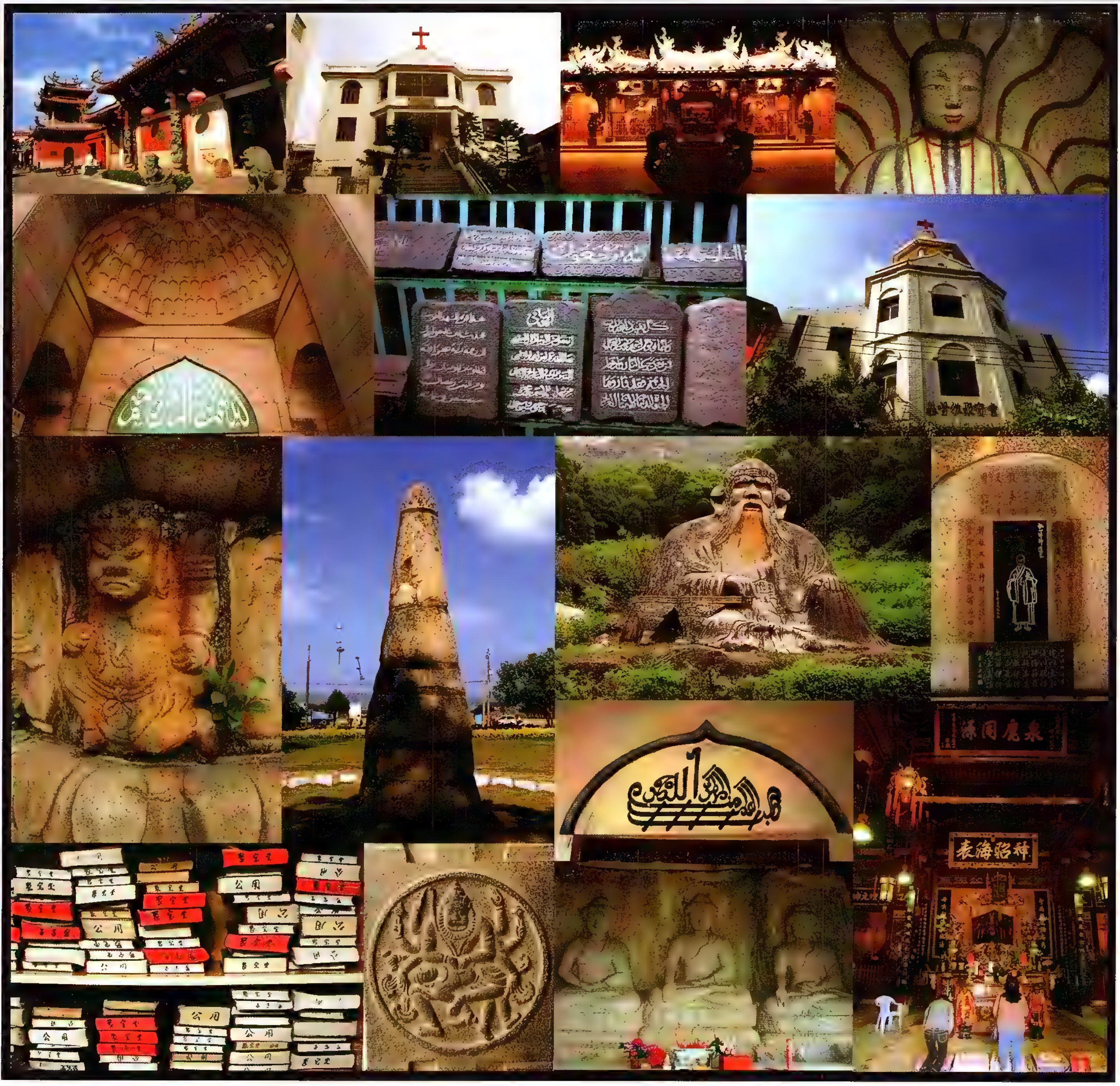
Address: Lüzhou (Oasis) Road West, Turpan, Xinjiang

Tel.: (0995) 856 1113 Room rate: 200 yuan / room

Sketch Map of Turpan City Downtown


Xihuan Road
Gaochang Road
Lüzhou Road West
Lüzhou Middle Road
Lüzhou Road East
To Grape Valley
Geri Road
Gaochang Hotel
Kelike Road
Xinfu Road
Xincheng Road
Grand Turpan Hotel
Laocheng Road
Jiaotong Hotel
Long Distance Bus Station
Wenhua Road
Dongyuanhuan Road
Qinnian Road
Chunshu Road
Jiaohe Hotel
Jiefang Road
Emin Minaret

The Karez Well Museum. (by Huang Yanhong)



A Halt for the Gods

Quanzhou

Photos & Article by Stephen Or

What would Quanzhou, a city in East China's Fujian Province look like to people? Beside finding traces from the ancient Marine Silk Road, a casual walk in the old town of Quanzhou allows one to explore an array of historical monasteries and find the charm that has helped it retain the hearts of immortals. All gods converge as if Quanzhou is a halt for the gods.

Left page: Plenty of heritages from Islamism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Manichaeism remains to this day in Quanzhou.

1. A mosque with Arabian characteristics is also found in Quanzhou.

The roads of Quanzhou appear quiet after rain. It isn't as though this city situated at the south-eastern coast of Fujian had been the starting point of the 'Marine Silk Road' more than 1,000 years ago. It attracted merchants from Asian countries such as Tazi (Arabian region), Persia, Ryukyu Islands, Korea, India, and Melaka, and even Mediterranean countries such as Spain and France. Those merchants not only introduced goods to Quanzhou, but also the religions from their hometowns. Plenty of heritages from Islamism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Manichaeism remain in Quanzhou. Some of these existed religions disappeared soon after those passing businessmen, and some of them took root in the town and flourished. However, most of them had perished in history along with the fading brilliance there. However, such a situation has helped Quanzhou retain its nostalgic atmosphere and simple local style in comparison to the prosperity of Xiamen or Fuzhou, two other big cities of Fujian Province.

Worshipping Holy Mothers from East and West

Quanzhou was known as Coral Tree Town in ancient times. Coral Tree is a deciduous tree originating in Asia. Entering Quanzhou from its southern pass, vehicles pass Shunji New Bridge, which crosses Jinjiang River. In the Jinjiang Park next to the bridge stands a four-metre high stalagmite, which looks like a bamboo shoot, even a male sex organ to some people. It is believed the relic of Brahmanism from ancient India (male sex organ is regarded as a symbol of revitalistion by Brahmanism). Not large in size, the old district of Quanzhou was most prosperous in ancient times South Gate, where just passed the Shunji New Bridge. Today, South Gate is left with ruins of the town's gate, and a temple was built to worship Tianhou (the Goddess of the Sea) by the ruins. Built more than 800 years ago in Southern Song Dynasty (960 — 1279), it is the only Tianhou temple out of other 800-odd in China, classified as under national strategic protection. Zheng He (1371 — 1433), the earliest Chinese who explored the Indian Ocean seven times, used to host grand sacrificial ceremonies to pray for safe voyage at this temple before every trip.

Going ahead from the ruins of ancient town gate, one reaches Jubao Street. A place that had once gathered extraordinary treasuries from around the world, it now remains as an ordinary lane with groceries, noodle shops, and Chinese funeral necessities shops stand. Passing the crowded Chinese market, I noticed a cathedral standing humbly at the corner of the street. It seems that the locals do not mind worshipping gods from the East or West, as long as they are being blessed.

A Tour of Buddhism

The old district of Quanzhou can be summarized as this: stone pagodas in east and west, with a long street running north to south. The Couple Pagodas refer to the Renshou and Zhenguo stupas built in the east and west respectively in the Kaiyuan Monastery. 'Long street' indicates the Zhongshan Road which is the busiest section of Quanzhou. Kaiyuan Monastery was first built in Song dynasty (960 — 1279). The Buddhist statue of the Esoteric Doctrine, different to the Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future (*Amitayus Buddha,*

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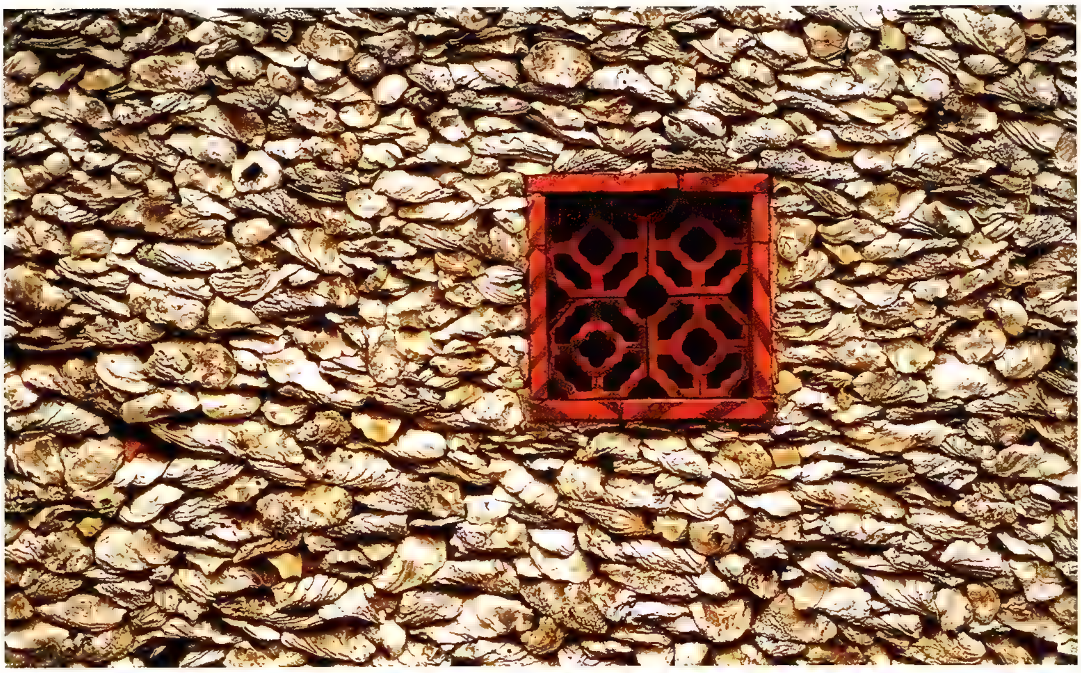


1. Greyish walls stuccoed with thousands of discarded oyster shells reflects the unique character.

2. Old mansion of traditional Quanzhou style — swallow-tail shaped roof, black tube-shaped tiles, red bricks, and decorative iron window frames.

3. A place that had once gathered extraordinary treasuries from around the world, Jubao Street now remains as an ordinary lane where groceries, noodle shops, and Chinese funeral necessities shops stand.

Buddha Dipankara, Buddha Maitreya) commonly seen in other monasteries or temples in China, is enshrined in its Main Hall. The Esoteric Doctrine had been introduced to China since the mid-Tang dynasty (618 — 907) but quickly declined in two generations' time. The one in Quanzhou is though preserved in another way.

There is a small hut located in suburban Quanzhou where a Manichaean statue, which looks quite similar to a Buddhist statue, is found. Manichaeism was popular in the early Ming dynasty (1368 — 1644), but it was soon suppressed by the royal government, and therefore its remaining followers were forced to secretly continue their religious practices. As a result, the Manichaean statue was also 'decorated' like a Buddhist statue.

On the stone pillars in the rear passageway of Kaiyuan Monastery some obscure stone statues have been carved. One of them, with three heads and six arms in a dancing posture, is the god statue of Brahmanism. I am not sure if this is the primary god *Shiva* of Brahmanism or not. The only thing I know for certain is that the statue was brought by Indian merchants a long time ago. In the west pagoda in Kaiyuan Monastery there is a relief which looks like the Monkey King from *Journey of the West* (a classical Chinese Literature). A study has shown the pagoda was built in 1237, which was far from the publication of the novel. I guess the idea of the relief came from a monkey god described in *Ramayana*, an epic from Hinduism.

Islamic Migration

Tumen Street is another area where buildings

4. Expatriate Chinese originally from Quanzhou introduced architectural features from South-eastern Asian countries.

5. Seafood is the most common item in Chinese markets of coastal cities like Quanzhou.

with a nostalgic atmosphere are centred, including the Qingjing Mosque, Emperor Guan Temple, Confucius Temple, grand mansions, Qipan Garden, Mansion of Zhuangyuan (first-class ranked scholars from Imperial Examination), Donglu Lane, and Lane 32, etc. The Qingjing Mosque was built in 1009 in Northern Song dynasty (960 — 1127) modelled on the Damascus Mosque in Syria. For hundreds of years, the Chinese God War, Guan Yu (160 — 219), Allah, and Confucius have been peaceful 'neighbours'. Although the Confucius Temple turns to be historically old, it still contains an impressive looking. The study desks were still neat in the hall where the Confucius statue is enshrined. A few elemertary school students who came to attend Chinese calligraphy classes were sitting here

3

鲤城金信药店
LICHENG JINXIN PHARMACY
博 雅
足
4

5

formally, holding their brushes in deep thought. Will they be inspired by such a lofty atmosphere?

The area around the Confucius Temple was once the residential area for many social celebrities. Apart from these red-brick mansions, there are some houses whose walls were uniquely made of oyster shells. When their greyish walls are covered by the blossoming rosy coral flowers in summertime, it shows off the special character of Quanzhou. Once I read about the wharfs in East Africa, where there are also many oyster shell walls. I believe the idea was actually spread out through the Marine Silk Road. What a shame that, in the urbanization of Quanzhou today, fewer and fewer of these oyster shell walls are being preserved.

Enjoy Quanzhou's Local Snacks

The most energy-laden treats you are likely to find among streets and lanes in the old town of Quanzhou will be the local Fujianese snacks. If one believes that a city builds up its taste with a strong history, then it will also live up to its reputation with delicious local snacks.

Four-fruit Sweet Soup with Seaweed Pudding

Four-fruit soup is a typical Fujianese dessert. Diners should choose four fruits (can be diced watermelon, pineapple, Hami melon, or cooked red bean, Taro, and cereals) from a large variety. The fruits are then added with iced water and honey. Remember to add the seaweed pudding to create a perfect hot-and-cold dish!

Address: 1-3 Beside Tianhou Palace, Tianhou Road
Tel: (595) 2220 6692, 2282 6692

Stir-fried Oyster Cake

Add fresh baby oysters with leeks cut into half-inch long pieces and a little sweet potato powder. Stir-fry the mixture on a flat pan, and add in stirred egg when almost cooked. The cake tastes fresher with marinated sour turnip strips or sweet and sour sauce.

Address: Food stalls at 436 Zhongshan Road South (opposite to Qiaoguang Cinema). Do go early as the stalls close early in evening.

Thick Beef Soup

There are many snacks made of beef in Quanzhou, such as the beef steak in 'Hao Cheng Cai' Restaurant located near Guandi Temple, as well as thick beef soup offered on every street and lane. The beef soup is cooked with strips of fresh beef and sweet potato powder.

Address: Snack shops in every streets and lanes in Quanzhou.

Sand Bug Pudding

The snack was first created in Anhai, which is located between Xiamen and Quanzhou, since the freshest sand bugs are found on Anhai's clean beaches. After stir-frying and cooking, the gelatinous substance from the sand bugs will dissolve into liquid and become a chewy pudding after freezing. The snack has an odd name but a great taste!

Address: Food stalls at the entrance of Qingjing Mosque or in Food Street, only 1 yuan each.

Hou A Po Meat Dumplings

Many famous Quanzhou snacks, such as the Hou A Po meat dumplings, originated from traditional festivals. The dumplings are filled with mushrooms, dried baby shrimps, chestnuts, pork, sticky rice, etc. Peanut paste, minced garlic, sweet and spicy sauce can also be added to give them a richer taste.

Address: 45 East Street (close to the Bell Tower)
Tel: (595) 2225 3526, 2250 3066

Green Lentil Cake

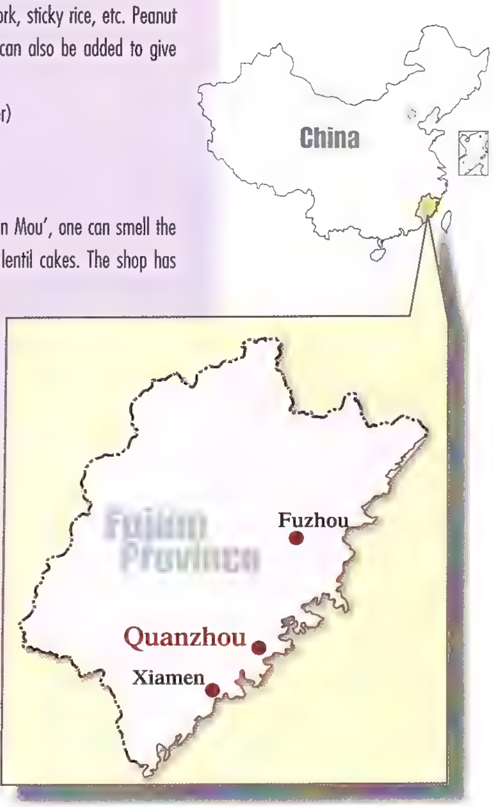
Before even entering the shop 'Linji Zhengquan Mou', one can smell the fragrance of its specialized hand-made green lentil cakes. The shop has been in business for a few generations and is much appreciated by expatriate Chinese.

Address: 242 Dong Jie Men Pai (west of 1st Hospital)
Tel: (595) 2227 8669

Mian Xian Hu Noodles

The noodles are cooked with seafood like prawns, oysters and razor clams, and duck or pig intestines are also added. It seems more like Chinese style with deep-fried dough.

Address: Shui Men Guo Zai Food Shop, 21 Shuimen Street
Tel: (595) 2237 4472



1. Gucuo Tea House, a prime place to reminisce about old Quanzhou.

Right page: Dozens of local snacks show off the vibrancy of the old Quanzhou town.

If you are interested in visiting Quanzhou's unique old mansions, there is one located in the back street of the Guandi Temple which has been refurbished as a teahouse named 'Gucuo' (literally means old mansion). Under the reflections of those decorating red lanterns, there are the most typical Fujian building details — the swallow-tail shaped roof, black tube-shaped tiles, red bricks and decorative iron window frames. Sometimes there are performances of Fujian Nanyin (South China music) and narrative singing. A stranger to their local dialect, yet, I can simply guess the plot and feelings from the performers' wonderful body and facial expressions.

Translated by Y. Rouge

Travel Tips

Transportation: Xiamen Airlines runs flights between Hong Kong and Quanzhou of Fujian Province, which take one hour. Or, one may fly to Xiamen and then connect to Quanzhou by passenger car which takes 2.5 hours. Evening sleepers buses also set off from the Qiaoshe or Luohu Buses station in Shenzhen and arrive at Quanzhou the following morning.

Taxi will be the easiest means to explore Quanzhou town. Flag-fall is 6 yuan, plus 1.6 yuan for each extra km.

Accommodation: Without being a hot tourist destination, Quanzhou's hotels offer cheaper rates. Standard rooms for three- to four-star hotels cost about 150 ~ 300 yuan.

Scenic spots: Mt Qingyuan, Chongwu Ancient City, Kaiyuan Monastery, Tianhou Palace, Qingjing Mosque.

* There is a tourist bus touring all the spots mentioned above, which is most suitable for backpackers. The bus, No. 601, departs every 16 minutes.

Tibetan New Year in Southern Gansu

Photos & Article by Adam Wong

The period between the 13th and 15th of the first lunar month is the time for Tibetans to celebrate their New Year. In the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Gannan (southern Gansu Province), which is also known as 'Little Tibet', both Labrang Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist educational institution, and Langmu Monastery on the border between Gansu and Sichuan provinces hold spectacular Buddhist ceremonies, such as *Thangka* (traditional Buddhist painting of a holy being) unfolding and 'Skin Dance' (masked dancing). Tibetan people from miles around come to celebrate this most important festival...

Gannan (southern Gansu) New Year is known as the 'Maolan Festival', and it is also called the Summon Festival, which denotes a prayer ceremony. A series of activities start on the 3rd and end on the 17th of the first lunar month. Meanwhile, a number of ceremonies are held, including freeing captive animals, displaying the Buddha, the Skin Dance and Lantern Festival. The open days of the Labrang Monastery and Langmu Monastery to laymen from the 13th to the 15th however draws the largest crowds. The ceremonies held in both monasteries have their own styles, but they take place at the same time therefore you can only visit one of them.

2

1. The Buddha statue is unveiled and the cloth waves in the wind prompting the crowds to cheering loudly.
2. Lamas carry the Buddha statue out of Labrang Monastery through the crowds to the mountain slope.

Labrang Monastery

When standing in front of the sacred Labrang Monastery, you will surely be overwhelmed by its magnificence.

The Icon of Tibetan Buddhist Institution

Labrang is situated in the western suburbs of the county seat of Xiahe in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, which is 150 km from Langmu Monastery; therefore, it is considered a spiritual place by Tibetans. Labrang is a monastery of Tibetan structure and the whole group of buildings is composed of stone-wood and mud-wood walls. The roofs are supported by low reddish-brown walls of hemp reeds, which give a solemn religious atmosphere to the building. Labrang is also one of the largest Tibetan Buddhist education institutions and has nurtured numerous learned monks.

Labrang has the feel of a university campus, with scripture-carrying lamas constantly pass by. Students in red *kasayas* (Buddhist monks' robes) sitting in the packed scripture hall are from all around the world, but their voices are united as they recite sutras which echo off the walls.

In fact, the Labrang monastery is the largest Tibetan Buddhist institution of the Gelug Sect (one of the five main lineages), which comprises Wensi (Listening and Thinking) College, Upper and Lower Tantric College, Time-wheel College, Hevajra College and Medical College. After admission, it takes ten years to complete a study programme, so very few people are able to devote such a long time to obtain the highest degree, '*Geshe*'.

An Unparalleled Scene

Joining in the celebrations at Labrang Monastery, you can get a feel of its college atmosphere and the devotion of the Tibetan pilgrims. Compared with Langmu Monastery, it has more tourist facilities such as hotels, small inns and restaurants, as well as all stalls and shops selling handicrafts and daily necessities. Tourists enjoy not only comfortable accommodation, but also wonderful shopping and dining experiences.

The *Thangka* unfolding ceremony at Labrang Monastery is unparalleled. The streets and squares are crowded with people as well as foreign visitors. The streets are so congested that 'baton-carrying monks' make channels through the crowd for the monastery procession to move forward. Sometimes visitors who act too assertively to take photos of the parade are hit by the batons accidentally.

The Lantern Festival held on the 15th is the climax and finale of the New Year festivities at Labrang Monastery. Patterned tablets with butter flowers are on display and the photos of late religious leaders and senior monks are placed among the colourful flowers. People queue to worship and offer their butter oil lights to the altar.

1

Langmu Monastery

Langmu Monastery is 90 km from South Guqu County in Gansu Province, lying on the border between Sichuan and Gansu. Langmu Monastery in Gansu and Gerdi Monastery in Sichuan, separated by Bailongjiang River, are only 300 m from each other. This section of the river is small and in fact it is only the source for the whole river. Therefore, the locals call Langmu Monastery the 'Gansu Temple' and Gerdi Temple the 'Sichuan Temple'. Both residents and visitors generally call both monasteries Langmu Monastery.

A Watercolour Painting by the Mist

This Tibetan Buddhist monastery is not large in size but it is certainly the most special monastery I have ever seen. As it is situated 3,600 m above sea level, many visitors suffer from altitude sickness to this amazing site. Coming to Langmu Monastery in winter, you will find mist rising from the surface of Bailongjiang River and in fact the river water is warm because of the natural geothermal heat. Tibetan women are often seen washing their hair and clothes at the riverside. Watching the pedestrians travel along the single plank blurred by the mist, gives the scene the appearance of a watercolour painting in motion.

Visiting during religious festivals, you will find the tiny monastery is overcrowded with tourists. Fortunately, we had made our hotel reservation in advance so that we didn't have to worry. Well-dressed Tibetans were seen everywhere in the streets. Some were walking with elders and children, some were riding horses and some were even stopping to kowtow throughout their journey.

Spectacular Thangka

The 13th is the day for 'Displaying Great Buddha under Sunlight'. The ceremony is officially known as 'Unfolding Buddha' (*Thangka*) because whether it is sunny, snowy or cloudy, the Buddha statue, which occupies a surface area of tens of square metres must be taken to the mountain slope for display.

In the early morning, under the rising sun, several hundred lamas led by senior monks carry the wrapped 20m-long *Thangka* from the monastery to the stage. On the way, some of the lamas play religious musical instruments and others carry scripture pillars and umbrellas. Crowds of believers were everywhere on both sides of streets. In the crowds, there were elders waving scripture wheels, young mothers carrying their babies, poor people wearing dirty goatskin jackets and even rich people dressed in expensive fur coats and jewellery. However, standing before the Buddha, everyone was equal regardless of wealth and social status.

When the Buddha statue was being slowly unveiled, the crowds cheered and threw their white *khatas* (traditional ceremonial scarves) to the Buddha statue. The lamas played music while reciting the 'six-syllable invocation (mantra) of *Avalokiteshvara*'. The bass sounds of the horns echo amid the enchanting sound of the sutras...

Unique Skin Dance

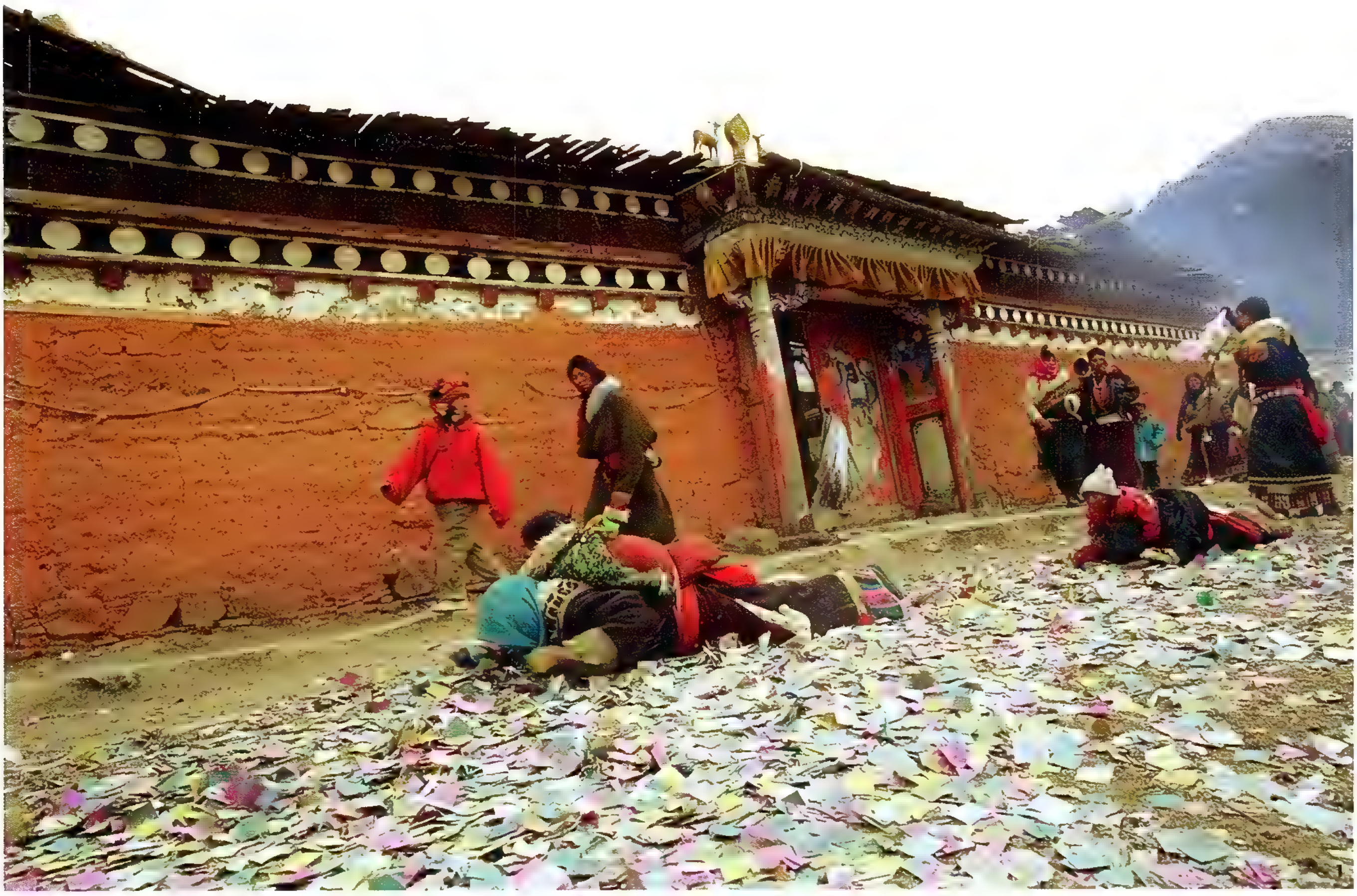
The next day was time for the remarkable Tibetan Drama. The monastery was again packed with crowds. *Tibetan Drama* is also known as the 'Skin Dance' and the locals also often call it 'Dance Great God'.

During the performance, the lamas wear large masks that usually represent images of gods and ghosts. They dance to the rhythms of the background music. Their body movements are slow and the performance creates a strong religious atmosphere. With the audience immersed in the performance, suddenly the sound of firecrackers bought them alive and the cheering started. Tilting my head, I could see a large group of temple visitors on the opposite mountain slope letting off firecrackers, with smoke rising dramatically in the air. While the visitors were cheering, they threw 'lungda' (printed paper with lines from sutras) into the air. The whole scene was reminiscent of snow falling from the sky.

Circling the Mountain Brings Good Luck

On the 15th, the last day of the festival, people

1. Outside Langmu Monastery, monks wearing masks prepare to start the parade.
2. The 'circling-the-mountain' on the 15th of the New Year month is the finale of the festivities. Groups of monks make channels through the crowds and believers follow closely behind.
3. Early in the morning, lamas blow their horns to signal that the religious ceremony is about to begin.
4. A young lama of Langmu Monastery.



1. In the crowds, many devoted believers 'kowtow' all the way. These two old Tibetan women were carry their grandchildren on their backs while kowtowing along the street.

were the most emotional. In the early morning, participants of 'circling-around-the-mountain' gathered at the monastery and followed the scripture pillars and umbrellas. Monks carrying the golden Buddha Sakyamuni (founder of Buddhism) statue were walking along a narrow path to the peak and were followed by visitors and locals. The people with scripture wheels and *khata* in their hands prayed for good weather, herds of strong cattle and goats, good health for family members, safety and fortune... Looking at the people from afar, it seemed that the queues were endless.

I felt exhausted after rushing along with the crowds to take photos. I thought the festivities were finally over, but while I was preparing to leave, I saw a blazing fire at the open area in front of the white tower. When the fire was burning more intensely, the Tibetans began to stand up and then they sang and danced 'Guozhuang' hand in hand around the fire. The scene was an enthusiastic Tibetan folk celebration. Young people became especially excited, shouting happily and jumping over the fire... The light of the fire shone on the smiling faces and its heat warmed my heart.

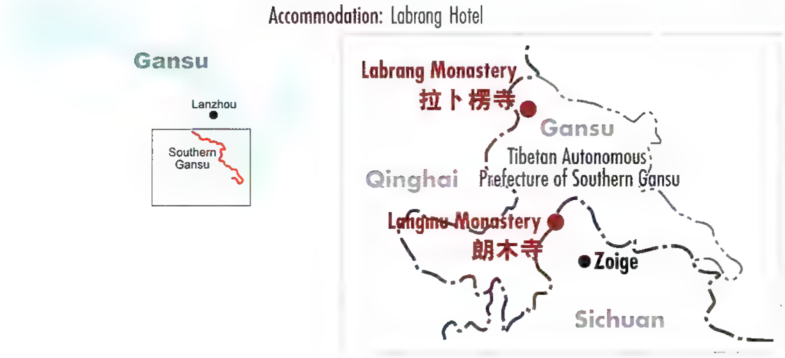
Translated by Ezekiel Pang

Travel Tips

Labrang Monastery

Transport: The distance from Lanzhou to Xiahe is 275 km and the travelling time is 4 hours. Daily public bus services between the two places are available.

Accommodation: Labrang Hotel (Labuleng Binguan) 2 stars, standard room 150~180 yuan; guesthouses and small Tibetan inns 30~40 yuan / person



Admission: 5 yuan

Langmu Monastery

Transport: Buses cover routes between Lanzhou, Xiahe and Ruoerga, Sichuan. Get off at Langmu Monastery Road and change for mini-rickshaws there or walk 3 km to the monastery.

Accommodation: Langmu Monastery Hotel 30~40 yuan / person; guesthouses and small inns about 15 yuan / person

Admission: 8 yuan

Reminder: The destination is at an altitude of 3,600 m. You are advised not to engage in rigorous physical activity and be warned that you may wake with a headache. Packing altitude sickness medicine is recommended.

Now ~ 4 Mar **Taiwan**

Neimen Songjiang Battle Array in Kaohsiung

Neimen Township is known for its complete and rich folk battle arrays. The event takes place in Neimen Zihjhu Temple. The scenes and characters of the Songjiang Battle Array are derived from the novel *The Water Margin* written by General Songgiang. The leader, directing the team with flag in the middle of the circle, will be in charge of motions and different formations of the parade for different tactics, often accompanied with drums, gongs, and cymbals to cheer up the team members. Neimen Songjiang Battle Array groups have bloomed in the international arena. Since 2003, they have joined Rose Parade in the United States and Spring Make-up Performance Parade in Singapore.

8 Apr **Hainan**

Hainan International Coconut Festival

The festival will take place in more than one places in Hainan Province, including Haikou City, Wenchang County, Tongshi City and Sanya City. You can find the celebration of the lantern festival in Haikou, Coconut Street, Gala of the Miao and Li minorities, the international dragon boat race, national martial arts contests, performances, sports, and ceremonies for offering sacrifices to ancestors throughtout the entire province.

2008
MAR/APR

14 ~ 24 Mar **Hong Kong**

Hong Kong Flower Show 2008

The Hong Kong Flower Show is a major event to promote horticulture and awareness of greening. Every year, it provides a good opportunity for hundreds of thousands of local citizens and horticulture lovers all over the world to appreciate the beauty of flowers and share their experiences in cultivating them. The last Show attracted over 520,000 visitors and 185 organisations from 20 countries. The show will be held in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay.

13 ~15 Apr **Yunnan**

The Water-Sprinkling Festival of the Dai

Celebrations can be found in Jinghong City of the Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. Activities include dragon boat races, fireworks, drum-treading dance by elephants, peacock dance and sprinkling water (symbolizing auspiciousness). You can also visit parks and fairs to feel the spirit of festival with the locals.

27 ~ 30 Mar **Shanghai**

2008 World Travel Fair

The fifth World Travel Fair will be held and it will be an anniversary edition! Many activities, special packages, special promotions and a grand opening ceremony will ensure it to be unforgettable. The event will take place in Shanghai Exhibition Centre. One can look at the exciting tourism information of over 250 places in China, as well as others from the world.

20 ~ 26 Apr **Shaanxi**

Chang'an Annual International Calligraphy Meeting

The assembly will be held in Xi'an, the ancient city. A grand inauguration ceremony will take place. Inscriptions will be written on a 100-meter-long scroll. The Chinese and Foreign Calligraphers' Association will issue annual meeting certificates, and the four treasures of the study (writing brush, ink slab, ink stick and paper) will be on display. Tourists may visit the Forest of Steles, Jiucheng Palace and Shimen to have a touch on this beautiful aspect of Chinese culture.

15 ~ 25 Apr **Henan**

Luoyang Peony Fair

Luoyang began the cultivation of the peony 1,400 years ago, and over 350 varieties are grown there today. During the fair, the city blooms with the beautiful flowers, which give out a faint scent. Also, large performances are given. Visitors may view flowers, visit exhibitions of lanterns, paintings, calligraghy and photographs, and take part in symposiums and business talks. Tourists should go visit the renown Longmen Grottoes, the White Horse Temple and ancient tombs to experience the fair.

Sunshine in Abuluoha Village

The Story of a Photographer and a Leprosy Recovery Village

Photos by Lin Qiang Article by Huang Yanhong

After the attack of SARS, people were afraid of a simple sneeze, let alone leprosy. However, some people are willing to approach China's leprosy patients to show their care and love. Regardless of social prejudice, Lin Qiang, a photographer in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, for many years has taken frequent visit to an isolated leprosy village in Liangshan. He has helped the villagers pave a road and build a school and a playing field, creating the chance for children to receive education. The stunning photos he took of the village have aroused public attention and sympathy.

Through their camera lenses, photographers see much more of the world. For Lin Qiang, not only has he recorded the story of the leprosy village with his lens, but also has devoted himself to make a difference.

When he heard the name Abuluoha the leprosy village for the first time, it was summer 2003. As an education official from Sichuan Province, he had taken a number of photo shoots on the subject of education and children with AIDS in his spare time. When taking photos in Butuo County of Liangshan, he heard about the isolated leprosy village from the locals, and his professional curiosity was stirred. He tried hard to find a way to get there in order to unveil the mysterious place.

The village used to be where the government treated leprosy patients in 1963. Some regions were suffering from the disease in the 1960s. It was chronic and mildly contagious, characterised by ulcers of the skin, bone, viscera and leading to loss of sensation, paralysis, gangrene and deformation. The locals were scared of the disease, so they treated the leprosy patients cruelly. Some were driven deep into the mountains; some were burned to death, buried alive, or drowned. In order to prevent the spread of this '20th century plague', the local government sent all the 400 patients into the high and mountainous area of the Yi ethnic group.

China eradicated leprosy 40 years ago, but

1. A girl is holding her photo shot by Lin Qiang in which she also held a picture taken by him. Time changes, but the pose remains the same and so does their affection.
2. Due to the inconvenience of transportation, the villagers have to cross a river by cableway in order to get out of the village. The poultry on their backs is hung upside down as well.
3. Simple as it is, the playground means a lot to the children.

1. Lin Qiang and the students at the school's playground.
2. 64-year-old A Cong staring at his first photo. Unfortunately, he died of falling from a cliff when walking at night.
3. The facilities on the playground are made with trunks, tyres and cane, bringing countless hours of fun to the students.

the cured patients were left handicapped and deformed, which made them outcast from society. They had no choice but went on with their reclusive lives from generation to generation.

Lin Qiang finally found a county official to take him to the village two years later. Ashieri, a young man of Yi origin, was the only person who made contact with Abuluoha. With his help, Lin made his first trip to this legendary kingdom.

Abuluoha Where Time Has Stopped

Hidden away in the Xixi River Valley of Jinsha (the upper Yangtze) River, Abuluoha is 49 km from Butuo County, surrounded by mountains with an altitude of 3,000 m. To get there, one needs to cross a river, climb mountains and walk along a path less than one-metre wide with an abyss on one side of it. Lin Qiang told us that it was the most dangerous journey he had ever taken. Even having won the all-around championship of the People's Liberation Army, he said frankly that he didn't know how he had managed to finish the trip. He and his travelling partner had to hang precariously from the overhead cableway and push the pulley with both hands to cross the 70-degree slope with the roaring Xixi River below.

Somehow, they made it to Abuluoha. Lin Qiang was even more overwhelmed by the primitive conditions he found in the remote village. For decades, there had been few roads connected to it. Materials were in extremely short supply. Among the 177 villagers (67 families), 46 were leprosy survivors. They all lived in simple thatched shelters built by themselves, with just over 500 acres of arid farmland in the stony mountains. The work-point system at the time of the people's communes was still adopted there: a full day's work earned 10 work points, which equalled to 35 cents in 2005 and 46 cents in 2006. That was all the money they had to live on.

During his four-day stay, Lin Qiang visited around the villagers from door to door; and found that none of them could read. There were no doctors or access to electricity, let alone school. The second generation was very healthy. People were strong enough to carry a 100 kg-load at ease. It's a pity they never had a chance to go to school and knew nothing about the outside world. In addition, some of them are born paralysed because of inter-marriage between close relatives. Time had stopped still, but the tragedy went on.

A Dirge for Old Man A Cong

During his stay in Abuluoha, Lin Qiang always visited the seniors who lived in airy sheds and slept on the ground with no beds. He gave them money and whatever belongings he had on him, hoping they could live a better life in their later years. One of them whom he remembered the most was A Cong. The first time they met, A Cong was so poor to have clothes, so he walked naked. Lin Qiang took off his own clothes at once and gave them to A Cong as his first present. Then, he took a photo of A Cong, which was the first time the 64-year-old man had his photo taken.

A Cong used to be a leprosy patient and the disease left his hands and body deformed. However,

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the most horrible thing was people's prejudice against leprosy. He witnessed how badly people treated leprosy patients in the last century. In 1948, his uncle suffered from this disease, which was then regarded by the locals as 'a devil brought by the wind'. The villagers gathered money to buy a cow to feed him for three days, and then sewed him in the cow's skin and buried him alive in the mountain.

Lin Qiang thought a lot about this tragic story. How could we desert these people like the locals did to A Cong's uncle?

Lin Qiang was deeply moved by A Cong and other villagers' easy attitude towards death. A Cong said, 'I have been living in this village for 40 years and have my own house and a piece of land. I'm very satisfied that I can be able to live till now.'

Two months later, Lin Qiang came back to see A Cong. The village head told him that A Cong looked much better since his last visit. A Cong often dreamed about he had a new house, got married and even had a son. Actually, he never met a woman or married in his whole life. Lin Qiang decided to help building a new house for him. As soon as his next visit to Abuluoha, A Cong was already living in his new house.

In last April, Lin Qiang visited the village again, and brought a flashlight for A Cong who had always wanted one. However, he was told about A Cong died of falling from the cliff when walking in the mountains at night a month ago. Lin Qiang was saddened by that, and saying in tears,'He might not have fallen if he had had a flashlight. Now I can only wish him could use this to light his way in the next world.'

The First School Is Built

Though A Cong died, there were still many villagers and children living in the same world, who needed help. They were full of hope just like A Cong that strengthened Lin Qiang's resolve to help connect the village with the outside world.

As an educator, the first thing that came to his mind was building a school there. Only armed with knowledge could the children leave the mountain and change their and the village's lives.

As Butuo County is one of the poorest counties in the country, it would be impractical for the government to finance such a remote village. However, Lin Qiang urged the Education Administration of the County to give help and at last spared 200,000 yuan from its tight budget.

On 15th September 2005, the first school in Abuluoha Linchuan Hope Project School was established. Lin Qiang donated to the school his publishing payment of 30,000 yuan, and other things and money worth over 70,000 yuan. Also, a retired teacher, Ashijiri, promised to teach there.

For the first time, 34 children aged from 6 to 16, walked into their own classroom. The villagers were drawn around the school with big smiles on their faces by the loud and clear voices of the children in class. Abuluoha finally had its first school after 42 years.

Lin Qiang came back two months later, bringing money and teaching equipment to the school, and a set of stationery for each of the students. He checked some students' homework to see how they were doing with their studies. In fact, the teacher and students had been making extra efforts since the school opened, so the students had done much better than expected. Some young students were able to read almost 20 words and the older ones could read 50 to 80 words. They also learned basic arithmetic calculation. Lin Qiang spoke to the village head and suggested allocating two acres of farmland to the school. It would supply vegetables to the students and teacher, and help cultivate an ethos of hard work among the students

as well. He also asked to make a simple playground for the students. With his athletic experience, he found two of the students were particularly talented in sports and hoped to nurture their athletic ability.

When he was in the county, he told the head of the Education Administration that Abuluoha was isolated from the outside. The only way to change the situation was to connect the village with the world, so it was necessary to select some students a few years later and send them to study in the ethnic school in the county.

Road to the World

In his first trip, his toes became swollen from walking on the steep incline, so he wore bigger size 43 shoes the next time, which helped little as his toenails stuck into his flesh. When he had arrived at the village, the first thing he discussed with the village head was that he would help widen the road for them. Later, he donated 20,000 yuan to cover the expenses. The road was improved at 2 m wide.

What Lin Qiang helped to build is not just a mountain path, but a road to the world outside.

Whenever he left Abuluoha, the villagers asked the same question: whether he would come again. Gradually, they knew it was unnecessary, because he would definitely come visit again. Arousing public attention to the village by Lin Qiang's photos, his actions were moving more and more people.

In the summer of 2006, drought struck Abuluoha. There was not enough food to support the villagers till the end of the year. On hearing this, Lin Qiang withdrew his savings without hesitation to buy 4,200 kg rice for them. More than 1,000 books and 100 items of clothing were donated. Some corporations also joined the donation. A real estate company donated a 5,000-watt generator. Lin Qiang's friends also pitched in to help.

Lin Qiang said, 'in the village, if you are good to others, they treat you like a family member. Every time I was there, they killed their best cow as a treat for me. It was the highest compliment in the Yi people's customs. When I walked on the mountain path with the villagers, they always insisted to keep me on the safer side, in order to protecture from falling off the cliff. I was so moved by their affection.'

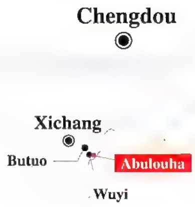
What made Lin Qiang proud and happy was that the children first called him 'principle', then 'Uncle Lin', and now 'Papa Lin'.

They often wrote him letters since they had been attending school. 'Dear principle, how are you? You have been away for a month. You were in my dream, but you disappeared when I woke up. I miss you very much. I'll listen to what you and our teacher say and study hard. Student in Linchuan School, Qieshaniuye.'

'Dear Papa Lin, my name is Jijuedadi. You are like my father. I would be keeping sheep instead of going to school without you... taking number 1 as a tree and 7 as a sickle.' Lin Qiang was absorbed in happiness whenever he talked about these kids.

Lin Qiang used to care little about his own appearance, wearing long hair to the shoulders like an artist. But surprisingly, he recently dyed his hair black. He told us the story behind this, 'Once I held the 7-year-old Jidishiri in my arms before saying goodbye to the villagers. The kid burst into tears saying that I had grey hair. He was worried that I would grow old and die. All of a sudden, all other students were crying... So when I was back in Chengdu, I had my hair dyed at once.' The pure hearts of Abuluoha had touched our caring and energetic photographer.

Translated by Huang He



1. The adults in the village never get a chance to go to school and now their children are studying hard to realise their parents' dream .
2. The cane-made swing on the playground is both primitive and environmentally friendly.
3. Lin Qiang helps a child with his studies.

A Dream Trip in Inner Mongolia

2007 is the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The Inner Mongolian TV Station and the CCTV series '*Travel Around China*' launched a grand media campaign, 'Traversing Inner Mongolia'. Ten volunteers screened in a global contest were divided into the west and east routes, which traversed inwardly from both ends to meet up in the middle, at the ruins of Shangdu (Upper Capital) of the Yuan Dynasty (1206 – 1368) in Plain Blue Banner of Xilingol League. As one of the ten lucky ones, I was grouped in the east route with teammates from Beijing, Guangxi, Tianjin and Mozambique, and traversed the Hulunbuir Grassland.

Photos & Article by Huang Yiming

On 20th May 2007, our team set off. Leaving Hohhot, the capital city of Inner Mongolia, we said good-bye to west team. As planned, it would be one month before we would see each other again. Heading east, our motorcade rushed through 2,000 km before arriving at the starting ceremony location on the east route, Heishantou (Black Mountain) Ancient City, or 'the Ruins of Khasar Ancient City', the former enfeoffment of Khasar, the eldest one of Genghis Khan's three younger brothers. Today, the ruins were nothing but obsolete mounds, looking all the more weathered and solemn in the setting sun. Ancient Mogul generals would hold rituals and present sacrifices at the altars of their forbears, praying for victory in the imminent campaign. To follow somewhat the tradition, we presented wine, milk, *khata* (traditional ceremonial scarf) and our deepest respect, praying for a smooth and fruitful trip.

Exotic Cultures

When Inner Mongolia is mentioned, everyone

1. In the beautiful dusk of the Hulunbuir Grassland, the silhouette of the lele cart outlined a peaceful feeling of 'home'.
2. Playing with a lamb on the Hulunbuir Grassland.
3. In Shiwei Russian Nationality Township, a family with Chinese father and Russian mother is fairly common.
4. Tsar-style tableware.

thinks of the passionate and generous Mongols and the melodious morin khuur (a chordophone of Mongolian origin) tweedle, a chordophone symbolic of the Mongolian nation. In fact, it's not only the Mongols who are passionate, but the Russians too. Also, not only is the *morin khuur* melodious, but so is the accordion.

49 ethnic groups live in Inner Mongolia. In addition to the Han and a large population of Mongolians, others include the Daur, the Evenk and the Russian. Our first stop was the Shiwei Russian Township, a quiet town with a feeling of simple antiquity, at the Sino-Russian border. Wood houses made of birch logs surrounded by a fence were scattered throughout the town. Behind the houses was the Ergun River whose banks were covered with luxuriant grass and trees. Russia was on the opposite side of the river.

We dropped by a few families and found they were all Russians. They all had blonde hair and blue eyes. The decor of the houses was exotic — the chunky wood chairs and table, dated iron beds with fancy wire patterns, Tsar-style tableware, Orthodox Church shrines, bread-baking fireplace, Russian nesting dolls and colourful Easter eggs. I was lost, wondering if I was in Inner Mongolia or not. However, the host spoke Mandarin with a Shandong accent. The atmosphere was amiable — and strange. He looked like a foreigner who could speak fluent Shandong dialect.

We learned that they were mostly descendants of Chinese and Russian inter-marriage. Decades ago men from the Central Plain (the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River) left home and ventured to Northeast China to make a living. Some of them married Russian girls in Hulunbuir.

We stayed with a local family that evening. I cooked with the hostess, baking *xleb* (Russian bread), mixing salad, stuffing dumplings and baking pancakes Chinese style. The diet reflected a cross-cultural mix. At the dinner table, the host played the accordion, singing in Russian *A Night at Moscow Suburb* and *Katyusha* (Russian Soviet wartime song). A small girl danced a Russian dance. We had a great time.

Last Hunting Tribe in China

The Mongols are a typical ethnic group living on the steppe. Though they are from forested areas, they are evolving from a migratory hunting society to a sedentary farming life. In the depths of the Great Xing'an Mountains, the Evenks of Aoluguya were the only ethnic group of people in the world that raised reindeer. They were the last hunting tribe in China. In August 2003, the government organised the hunters to move down from the mountains. 11 families, or 37 hunters, led the reindeer and walked down from the mountains as the first batch of eco-migrators. However, an 80-year-old woman refused to leave the mountains.

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1. In the Golden Horde Tribe by the Manicouagan River, we got totally immersed in the melodious, lonely tune of the morin khuur, the high-pitch passionate Khoomei (Mongolian throat-singing) and the powerful, lingering Urtiin duu (long song).
2. For centuries, generations of the Evenks made use of the local materials to build the 'cuoluozi' (tent) for shelter and survival.
3. Inside the Mongolian yurt, the area directly facing the main door is the living room and the most respected area. It is exclusively reserved for the host. The rear of the living room area is where the most valuable appliances and decoration are put.
4. The antler of the reindeer is cut once a year.

Her family stayed with her to continue with their hunting life. She was the headwoman of the tribe, Maria Suo.

It was not easy to locate the family of Maria Suo as they migrated frequently with the reindeer. Driving on the rugged road in the depths of the Great Xing'an Mountains, we had slim hopes of finding them. The driver told us that the family had left the spot where they were found one or two months before. Fortunately, we found them eventually. In the distance, we saw the 'cuoluozi' (tent) propped up with a few thin tree trunks and smoke rising. It appeared they were cooking.

The Evenks had rare contact with the outside world. As we did not know about their folk customs, they had little understanding of ours. I was told that the position right facing the entrance of the 'cuoluozi' was reserved exclusively for men. Women were not allowed even to pass by it. A female director sat right on the spot last time, and scared the son of Suo to death. The old lady was tolerant and said, 'I did not sit on the position for my whole life.' Her words made the director feel sorry long after the accident.

Walking near the 'cuoluozi', I saw a reindeer rambling in the woods. Reindeer is nicknamed 'four unlikes' as it has a horse-like head, deer-like horns, donkey-like body and bull-like hooves. As a half wild animal, it feeds on the moss in the forest and has to keep migrating. In the past, it was a transport tool for the Evenks. Later it became an important income source of the people. Old lady Maria was baking bread, their daily staple. She could speak only the Evenks language. According to her daughter-in-law, she was born in Russia. She was the youngest child of a family with over ten children, but was the smartest one. As the Evenks roamed and hunted, she followed her husband and migrated here. The Evenks belong to the Orthodox Church. After birth, she was baptised and given the name Maria.

The eldest son of the old lady was an expert in cutting the pilose antler of a young stag. To do the job, one needs to force the reindeer into a dead end formed with two crossed poles, and tie its body and head to the tree trunk. The antler cutter takes a saw to cut the pilose antler like a tree branch. Another person holds a bottle to gather the dripping blood. After the two huge antlers are cut off, the cutter ties the wounds with a tiny string to stop the bleeding. It is said that reindeer need to have their antlers cut annually, or they would grow too heavy and affect the reindeer's survival.

Entering Hulunbuir Grassland

On the way to the Hulunbuir Grassland, I happened to hear news on the radio that an old man would celebrate his 60th birthday. He invited fellow nomads to join his family naadam, a Mongolian carnival, and offered a lot of big prizes. We felt intrigued and asked the director of the local journalist station about the radio station. The director said that, as the grassland was vast and there was still no mobile phone coverage in many places, it was impossible to contact each other easily. Since the nomads loved to listen to the radio, they used that medium to announce such events. Sometimes one could even hear something like 'Jack, your wife asks you to go home now!' on the radio.

We headed to the home of the old man. It was the first time when I had stepped into an authentic, round Mongolian yurt, about 20 sq m. Once inside, I found it had wood flooring. I had thought that it would be blankets as they were warm and easy to carry. How could they carry the wood flooring when they migrated to another place?

The fireplace stood in the middle of the yurt. Fire is the holiest and the most respected thing for Mongolians, and the fireplace is the most important centre of life. Looking up the chimney, I saw the white *khata*, half opened skylight, and blue sky outside the skylight. The area around the door was the kitchen and storage area. The floor was covered with a plastic sheet. On both sides were folded beds stacked with high piles of gorgeous colourful quilts. When there are a large number of guests, the beds become sofa and the quilts become cushions.

As area directly facing the main door is living room and the most respected area. It is a place exclusively reserved for the host. The floor of the area was covered with thick blankets. The most valuable electrical appliances and decoration sat at the rear of this area. *Khata* and the portrait of Genghis Khan were hung on the wall. The wall of the yurt was different from what I had expected. It was formed with crossed poles and resembled a fence. Beams were stacked on the fence-like wall. Canvas was put on top of the whole structure to form a yurt. It was hard to imagine how they carry the cabinet, flooring, wall and roof when they were on a migratory trip.

The old man, Eji ('mother' in Mongolian), two sons, daughters-in-law and the family of the sheepherder lived together. They were busy preparing for the naadam at that time. On the celebration day there would be horse racing and wrestling. The contests were strictly divided into different rounds. The old man prepared horses, cattle, camels and other grand prizes.

Experiences on the Pasture

At 5 am, it was already in broad daylight. I needed to get up and work. Mongolian women are the most hard-working persons in the family. Taking a bucket and a stool, I followed an auntie to do milking in the cattle pen. She walked into the cattle pen, harnessed a calf with a rope and dragged it out. The cow ran out immediately and the calf couldn't wait and started suckling. The auntie tied the hind legs of the cow, led the calf aside, and then started to milk the cow. Curious, I asked why she did not let the calf finish its breakfast. She said the cow would produce milk only after a calf suckled her teats and only once a day. Therefore the calf was not allowed to finish all milk. After milking, she would leave some to the

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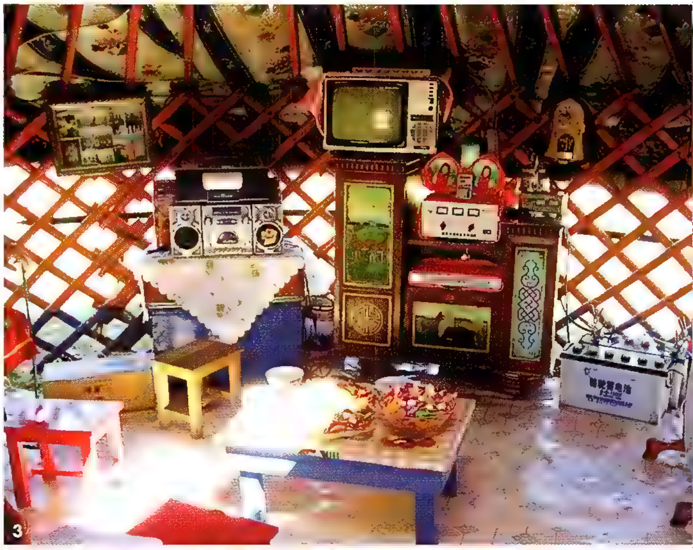
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1. Aobao, a stone mound stacked with rocks of different sizes, is a place for wish, prayer and hope. It is similar to the mani stone mound in the Tibetan culture.
2. Inside the pit of Bairin mine, I discovered a natural chicken-blood stone. The stone is of a fine texture and moderate solidness, which is best for seal or artware carving.
3. The east and west teams met up in Shangdu of the Yuan Dynasty. In addition to the crew of the TV stations, other lucky ones chosen as members are from Beijing, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Sweden, Mozambique, Tianjin, Guangxi and Mongolia.
4. The hospitable Mongolian nomads slaughter sheep and prepare a feast.
5. It is the first Mongolian yurt of a common family we have met after we entered the grassland.

calf.

Sitting on the stool, the auntie put the bucket between her feet, and pressed the cow's teats with the thumb and index finger of both her hands. The milk splashed into the bucket. With itching curiosity, I gave it a try. No matter how hard I tried, there was still no milk coming out.

Mongolian Carnival – Naadam

In the early morning the yurt was disassembled and would be re-erected on the summer pasture. I realised at this moment that the Mongolian yurt was designed in an ingenious way. The flooring, cabinet, wall and roof could all be dismantled like jigsaw puzzles. The roof, like a big umbrella, could be folded and put on the *lele* (cattle-drawn cart).

In this summer pasture over 20 Mongolian yurts and a central platform had been set up. Here for the duration of the naadam, the Mongolians would stay up throughout the night, drinking, singing and celebrating. In most cases, people, including us, would hurry at 4 am to the location, 30 km away, where the horse racing would start at 5 am and then, end up back at the summer pasture.

The horse riders were all kids as they were light weighted. The youngest one looked even shorter than the horse's leg. To reduce weight even further, none of the horses had a saddle. Unlike the horse racing in Hong Kong, there was no start line or starting gun. The adults herded the horses towards the starting point. All in a sudden, a horse galloped, all the other horses then took off, with the rumbling hooves stirring up clouds of dust.

Tracing Stone Memories

Bairin stone is famous all over the country. In Bairin Right Banner, we checked out the chicken blood stone close up. We also visited the auction

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site of the stone buyers. The auction atmosphere was tense, and the prices were incredibly high.

To have a look at the rock paintings remaining from the Neolithic Age (10,000 BC — 4,000 BC), the site of the Baichahe rock paintings, I was lucky to be able to follow the experts and climb the rocks with any gear. Eventually I stood on a cliff just big enough to stand and found the rock paintings. I was excited.

At the site of Zhongdu of the Liao Dynasty (916 — 1125), the Daming Pagoda built in the mid Liao Dynasty stood firm after a millennium of weathering. When it was constructed, the architect took the wind direction into consideration by specifically tilting the pagoda slightly. The national power of the Liao is reflected in this pagoda, the largest and best conserved ancient pagoda in China.

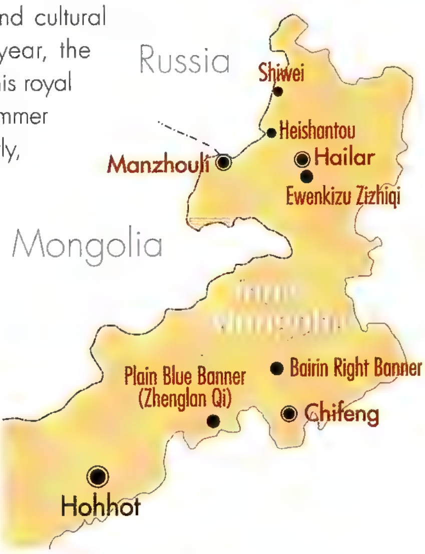
We found the mausoleum of Heshuo Duanjing Princess of the Kangxi Emperor reign in the Qing Dynasty (1644 — 1911) in Harqin Banner on a deserted mound nestled in green mountains. A stone archway, a pair of huabiao ornamental pillars and a stele were erected in this isolated place. The stele, inscribed in Manchurian, Mongolian and Chinese in the handwriting of Emperor Kangxi, was ornately carved and decorated. Heshuo Duanjing was the fifth daughter of Kangxi. In 1692, she was married to King Gelecang of Harqin, and passed away in 1710. The princesses used as political tools and married to Mongolians hundred years ago, still lied beneath, lonely in this alien land. They were traded for a short period of peace between the Steppe and the Central Plain.

Reunion and Feast

Built initially in 1256, Shangdu of the Yuan Dynasty in Plain Blue Banner (or Zhenglan Qi) was completed in three years' time by Kublai Khan (1215 — 1294) using a huge amount of resources. It was first named Kaipingfu. In 1260, Kublai was enthroned and chose Kaipingfu as his capital. Four years afterwards, it was renamed Shangdu, or Shangjing or Luanjing. After the establishment of Dadu (Great Capital, the current Beijing), the Yuan regime adopted a two-capital system. Apart from Dadu, Shangdu became the other political, military, economic and cultural centre of the Yuan Dynasty. Each year, the Yuan emperor would be escorted by his royal court to Shangdu to have a cool summer and attend to political affairs. Currently, the Yuan Dynasty's Shangdu is the largest, highest grade and best conserved site among all ancient grassland city sites in China.

On 18th June 2007, the east and the west routes reunited in Shangdu after a month of long-range travel over 2,000 km. From east to west, that was the trip I had dreamed of over 20 years.

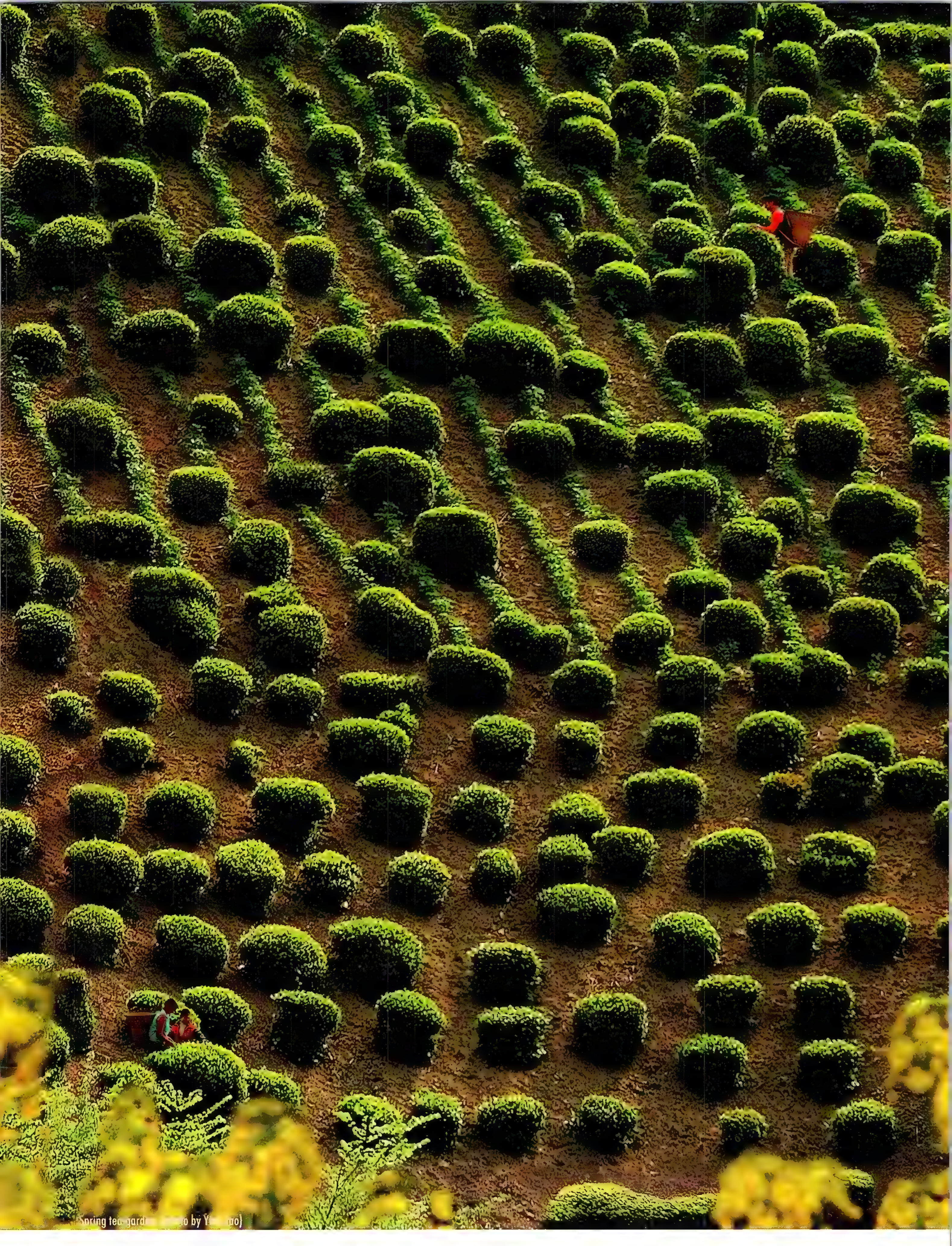
Translated by Zhang Boli



Greenland of Enshi. (photo by Shen Xianghui)

The Magic and Mystery of Western Hubei

The magic of western Hubei came as a total surprise. Wandering along the Qingjiang River, we were first intrigued by the little-known Enshi where a photography tour was most rewarding. That took us to the birthplace of Shennong — Shennongjia, where the remote jungle and the stories of Big Foot added intrigue to our journey. Finally, there was a visit to that playground of the gods — Mount Wudang — the place in which emperor Xuan Wu achieved immortality. It is a place of spirituality enshrouded in mist, where China's best Taoist architectural complex seems to float in a sea of clouds.



Spring tea garden (Photo by Y[illegible]ao)

Autumn in Enshi (photo by Mei Tao)

Photos by Li Shaobai, Shen Xianghui, Wu Jianguo, et al.
Compiled by Huang Yanhong

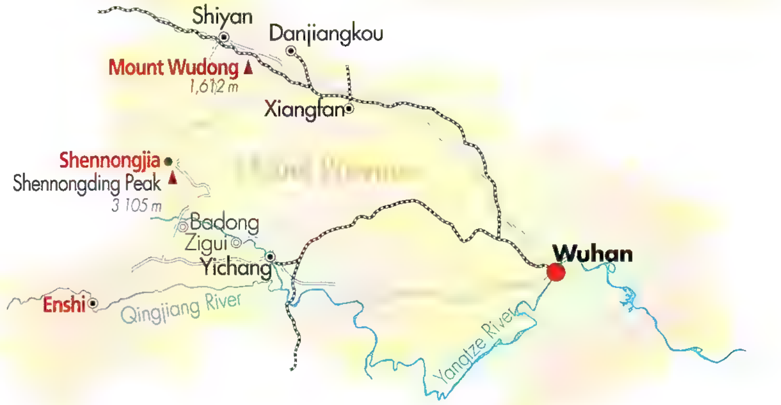
Enchanting Enshi

Lying deep within the mountains of southwestern Hubei Province, the city of Enshi is part of the Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture. Although it is sandwiched between the two big 'furnace' cities of Wuhan and Chongqing, Enshi enjoys an enviably cool climate.

Enshi prefecture is a magical land, with its 400-kilometre-long Qingjiang River, the soaring slopes of Enshi Grand Canyon, sights you won't see anywhere else — Suobuya Stone Forest, Tenglong Caves 'Crouching dragon swallowing the river' and for history buffs — Tusi Castle, Yumu Village and Dashuijing Tujia residential complex, all combined with colourful local customs and the down to earth hospitality of the Tujia people... This is still a virgin tourism territory untainted by excessive development.

We set off from Wuhan on a journey of over 300 km that became adventurous towards the end — travelling on treacherous cliff edges. This scared some passengers, while others regretted their decision not to fly. A morning departure would have had you arriving in the afternoon.

Cities built on the water are especially beguiling, and Enshi is no exception. A true to its name 'Qingjiang' (meaning clear river) runs from north to south through the city, adding sparkle and colour to the pretty city. Three bridges link the riverside streets. The south is the old town, and while crowded and narrow, it really comes to life at night. It's said that all the historical buildings, including ancient government offices, can be found here.



Western Hubei Touring Guide Map

Qingjiang River Rafting

Qingjiang River is known as 'China's best rafting destination'. Mid-stream runs from Enshi City to Fenshuihe Bridge, with a length of 38.5 kilometres. Between April and October is the best time for rafting along the Qingjiang River. The entire journey goes through 48 rapids and passes five valleys.

We got in a 3-metre-long rubber inflatable raft. Each has a guide — mostly local Tujia girls — with two boatmen. The raft drifts between valleys, tall mountains soaring into the clouds on the sides; rapids come one after another, the largest having a drop of 5~6 metres, almost like a waterfall! Don't forget to follow the tour guide's instructions when you go over large rapids — grab the safety rope tight and lean inwards!

Once into calmer waters, the guides get everyone into a 'water fight' — splashing buckets of water at other rafts, turning the river into a war zone. Then it's time to go onshore and enjoy Tujia delicacies in a Tujia-style wooden house on stilts. After lunch we embark again for more delightful sights. As the sun sets, we arrive at a jetty, step ashore, take the bus and get back to Enshi in just over an hour.

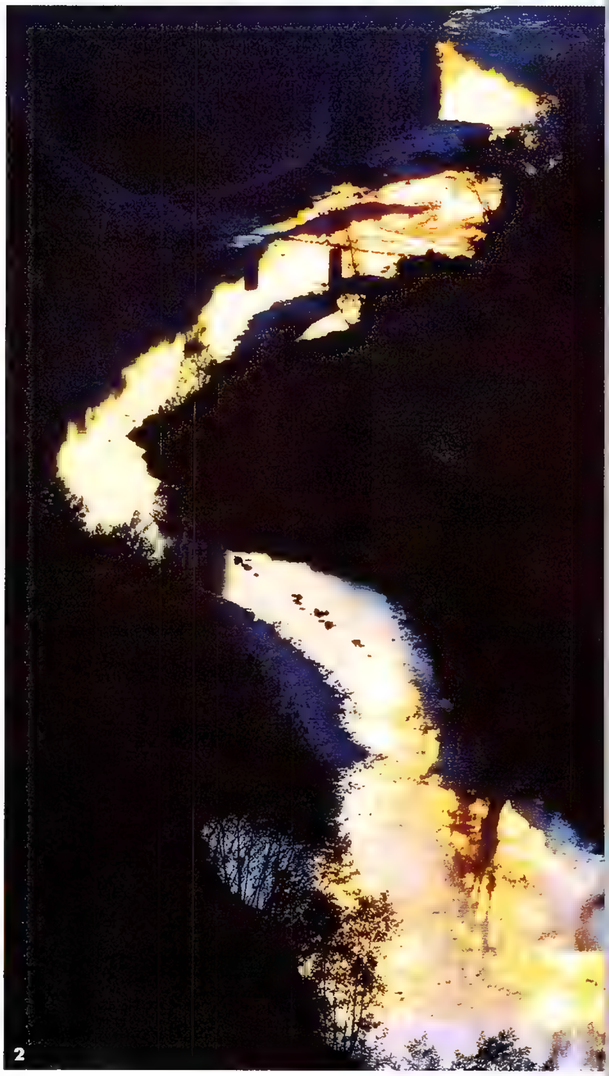
1. The towering peak.
2. The golden Qingjiang River. (by Wu Jianguo)
3. This rock looks like an incense stick in the Enshi Grand Canyon. (by Wu Luogeng)
4. The majestic Enshi Grand Canyon. (by Li Shaobai)

Shooting schedule: Qingjiang River, Dashaba, Husantiao (Tiger's Three Leaps), etc.

Best time: 9~10 am, 4~5 pm

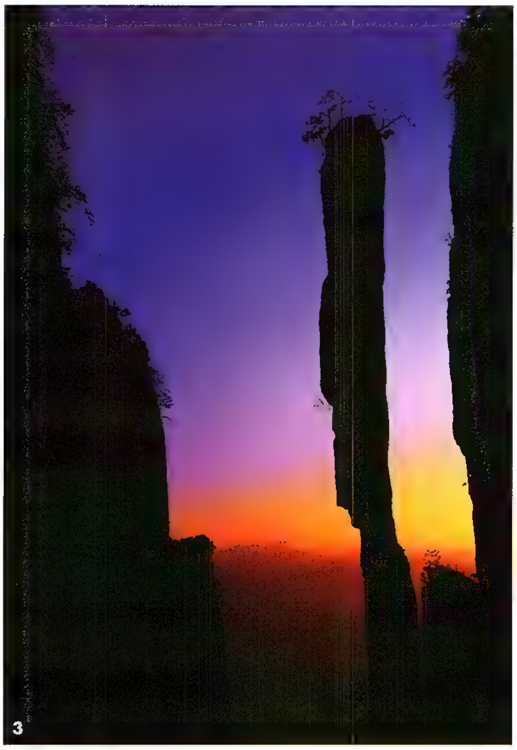
Best angles: Tanjiaba offers good panoramas of the Qingjiang River; Husantiao is good for medium shots and close-ups of rafting over the rapids.

Shooting tips: There is an abundance of scenery to photograph. Rafting costs 80 yuan; don't take photographic equipment onboard unless it's waterproof. Qingjiang River rafting over the rapids is quite adventurous and not suitable for those with heart disease, seniors and children.



Enshi Grand Canyon

The Enshi Grand Canyon in a section of the Qingjiang River, near the Yangtze River's Three Gorges, is between the townships of Tunbao and Banqiao. This 108-kilometre-long canyon, covering an area of over 300 square kilometres, has rocky cliffs, waterfalls, natural forests, ancient villages, and more. If you're lucky, you may be able to catch the spectacular sight of 'white clouds arising from the Qingjiang River' — a sea of clouds that winds along for miles like a huge dragon. The Karst landforms are another highlight, set among the cliffs and peaks. There is also a huge fissure — with 7.5 kilometres long and 75 metres deep. On both sides are dramatic waterfalls and flying streams. A Sino-French expedition came here and took 10 years to discover that. The subterranean river from Longqiao River to the Enshi Grand Canyon is 50 kilometres in length — the world's longest. There are 108 vertical wells in the subterranean river, somewhat like Karez Wells in Xinjiang. For a canyon this size, one or two days' travel is far from enough.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Shootin Schedule: Cliffs; Longmen (dragon gate) peaks; in sunrise Dalongmen's 'one incense'; the Great Fissure; waterfalls, etc.

Best time: There are good shooting opportunities year round. Shoot Dalongmen's 'one incense' sunrise in summer and autumn; photographing the rear mountain's single peak sea of clouds is ideal after rain; a sunny mid-day is excellent for taking photographs of the fissure and waterfalls.

Best angles: 'One-incense' can be photographed from many angles: from the side or above, from a level angle or at a lower angle. The rear mountain's single peak (Ritiansun) can be photographed from the mountain highway. Take shots of the families living in the canyon from Xiaolongmen. The Great Fissure needs to be shot from the left side of Dalongmen, from above.

Shooting tips: To get good shots of the grand canyon takes several days; to shoot night scenes or sunrises you would need to stay with local farmers; for other times stay in the towns of Mufu or Banqiao; for many of the local sights you may have to get guidance from local farmers.

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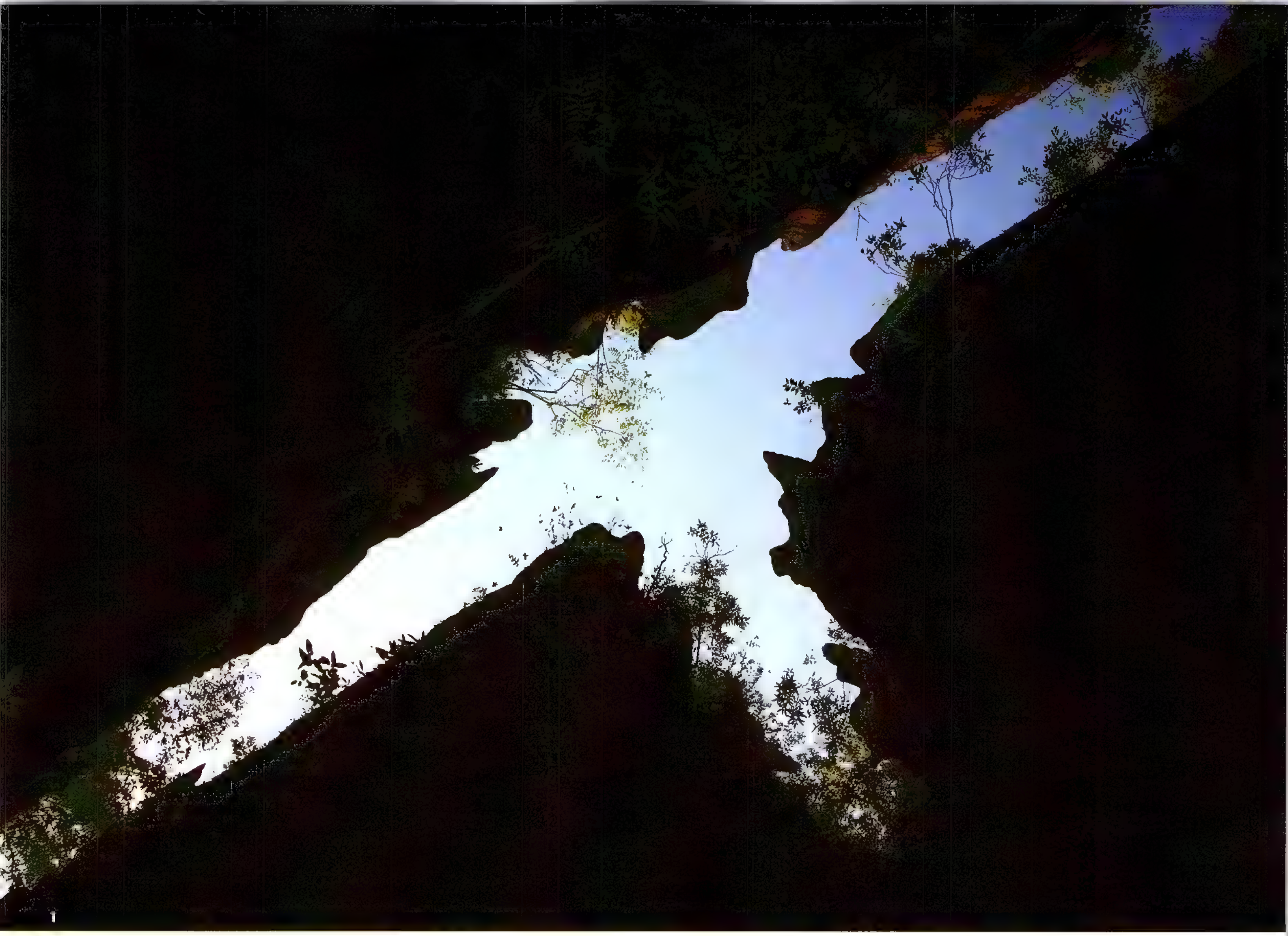


1. Looking up at the Suobuya Stone Forest. (by Li Shaobai)

2. The entrance to Tenglong Caves is big enough for a helicopter to fly straight in. (by Liao Guo)

3. China's largest cave theatre – showing the grand musical *Yishui Lichuan* throughout the year. (by Xu Jing)

Suobuya Stone Forest

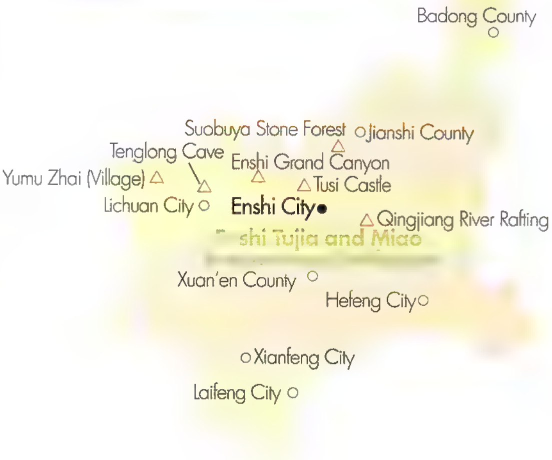
Taiyanghe (Sun River) Township can be reached by bus from the Xidu (Selenium capital) bus station; the buses leave once full and the trip — over 50 kilometres — requires two hours. It's best to hire a tour guide at the entrance because self-guided tours tend to miss out on things and you might get lost. It is still some way from the entrance of the scenic area to the stone forest, so consider taking a 5-yuan motorcycle ride to save energy for the heavy-duty hiking you'll have to do later.

'Suobu' means 'three' in Tujia language, so Suobuya means three *Ya* or mountain passes. With a total area of 21 square kilometres, it is second only to Yunnan's Lunan Stone Forest. The nine square kilometres that have already been developed display typical Karst topography, with prominent soluble layers.

The entire scenic area is like a huge gourd; we were surrounded by forests, resembling emerald screens all around. There are eight scenic zones within the stone forest and over 100 attractions. Walking within it is like being in a theme park of stones, some resembled eagles, others like princesses... you can't see them all in one day.

If you have to get back to the city before nightfall, it's best to leave the scenic area by 4 pm — wait by the roadside, but if there aren't enough people, sometimes the bus doesn't operate. If you're not in a hurry, relax and spend the night in the scenic area — there are farmer-run inns.

Enshi's Major Attractions



Shooting schedule: Lianhua Village, Liubuguan, Baotayan and the Gubai Folk Custom Park are excellent subjects.

Best time: Xiniugou (Rhino Gully) is best photographed at noon.

Shooting tips: Admission to the stone forest park costs 30 yuan; shuttle buses to the park entrance cost 12 yuan; there are restaurants and farmer residences in the scenic area (accommodation 10 yuan / person); during festivals or special occasions there are campfire parties; for example the 'Girls' Festival' in the seventh month of the lunar calendar is a riot of colour, music and dance.

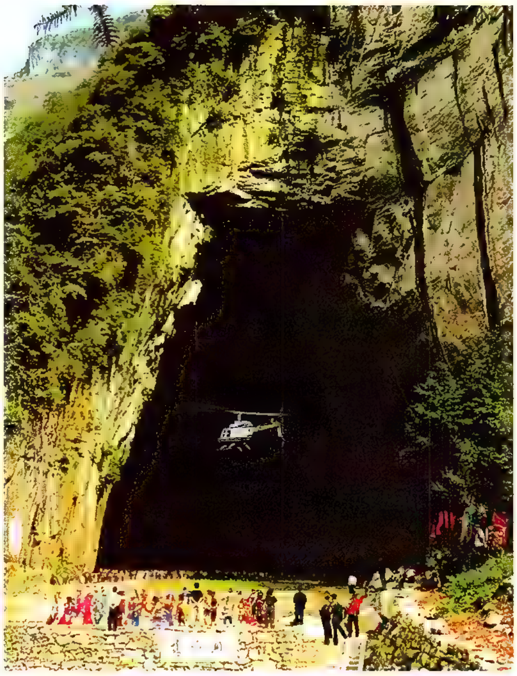
Tenglong Caves

Tenglong Caves rank as the world's most special caves and certainly the most unique in Asia.

Tenglong Caves are in Lichuan City, at the junction of Daba and Wuling mountains. Outside the caves, the mountain and river scenery is gorgeous — Qingjiang River drops over 20 metres here, forming a sight called 'Wolong Tunjiang'(Crouching Dragon Swallows the River), such is its speed and might.

The entrance to the Tenglong Caves is flat and enormous — believe it or not, 15 big trucks could drive in side by side. Go deeper inside and a variety of 'stone sights' present themselves: stone pillars, stone stalagmites, stone flowers, stone curtains, stone people, and stone monkeys are everywhere. There are also undercurrents which appear sporadically, sometimes wild, sometimes mild. Look closely, you may be able to find fish and shrimp swimming in the water — something seldom seen in other caves.

There is also a China's largest cave theatre. The magnificent musical *Yishui Lichuan*, based on Tujia culture, is shown here throughout the year, with a laser show that combines sound, light, electricity, water and fog.



Shooting schedule: Main cave entrance; waterfalls; '*Yishui Lichuan*' laser show; Dujia Zhai (Village), etc.

Best angles: Choose from the cave entrance square or the road opposite to shoot the cave entrance; to shoot Tenglong Caves Waterfalls — find a spot on the right bank.

Shooting tips: It is around 14~18°C in the caves all year round, so dress warm even in summer, or have rental jacket at the cave entrance; drinking water is sold at the performance area; tripods are recommended.

The clouds dissipate over Tusi Castle. (by Shen Xianghui)

Enshi's Tusi Castle

Located within Enshi City, the Tusi (the chief of a local tribe) Castle is known as 'China's No.1 Tujia Castle'. Even though the present version was rebuilt from the original, it is still quite awe-inspiring. Touring normally takes three hours but if you're serious about photography, even one full day may not be enough.

The castle is divided into different areas — ethnic cultural exhibition, religious exhibition, leisure and entertainment. You will see the traditional architecture and arts of the Tujia, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups. What really takes your breath away is Jiujintang (or Nine Entrance Hall), which combines the traditional Tujia residences on stilts, Baishoutang (Handshaking Hall), Guanyantang, library and theatre — truly a masterpiece of architecture, sculpture and painting arts.

Shooting schedule: City gate; Bingjunci (ancestral hall); Tuwangfu (Jiujintang); houses on stilts, etc.

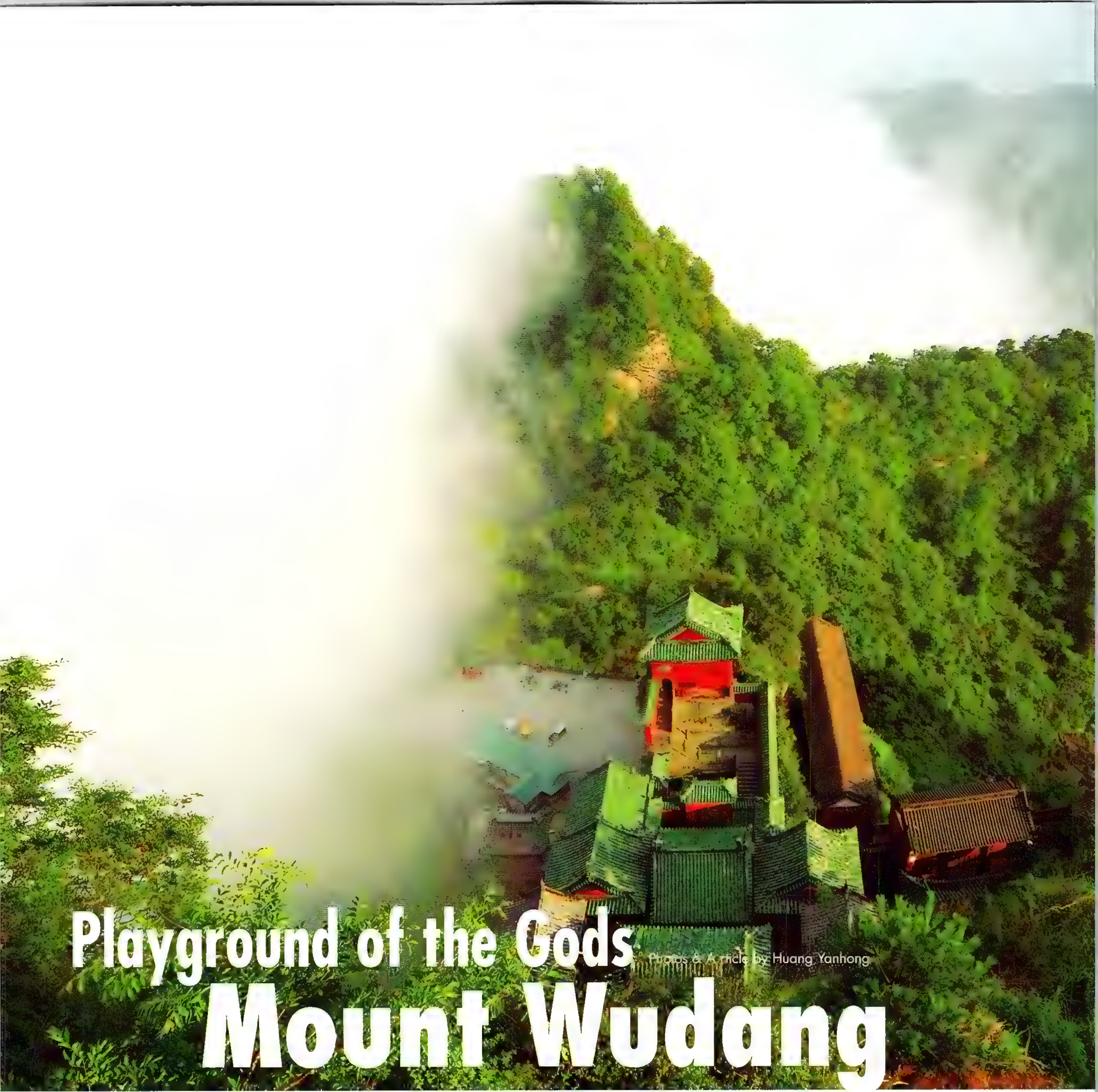
Best time: On fine days — shoot Jiujintang at sunset; overcast or rainy days are great for capturing the mystery of Jiujintang.

Best angles: Panoramic shots of Jiujintang can be taken from the hills on the opposite side.

Shooting tips: Ticket costs 20 yuan; Tusi Castle is in the downtown area, where many scenes are worth photographing; several trips are recommended.

Tujia-style dancing in the Tusi Castle. (by Shi Jianwen)

The [illegible] Castle gate



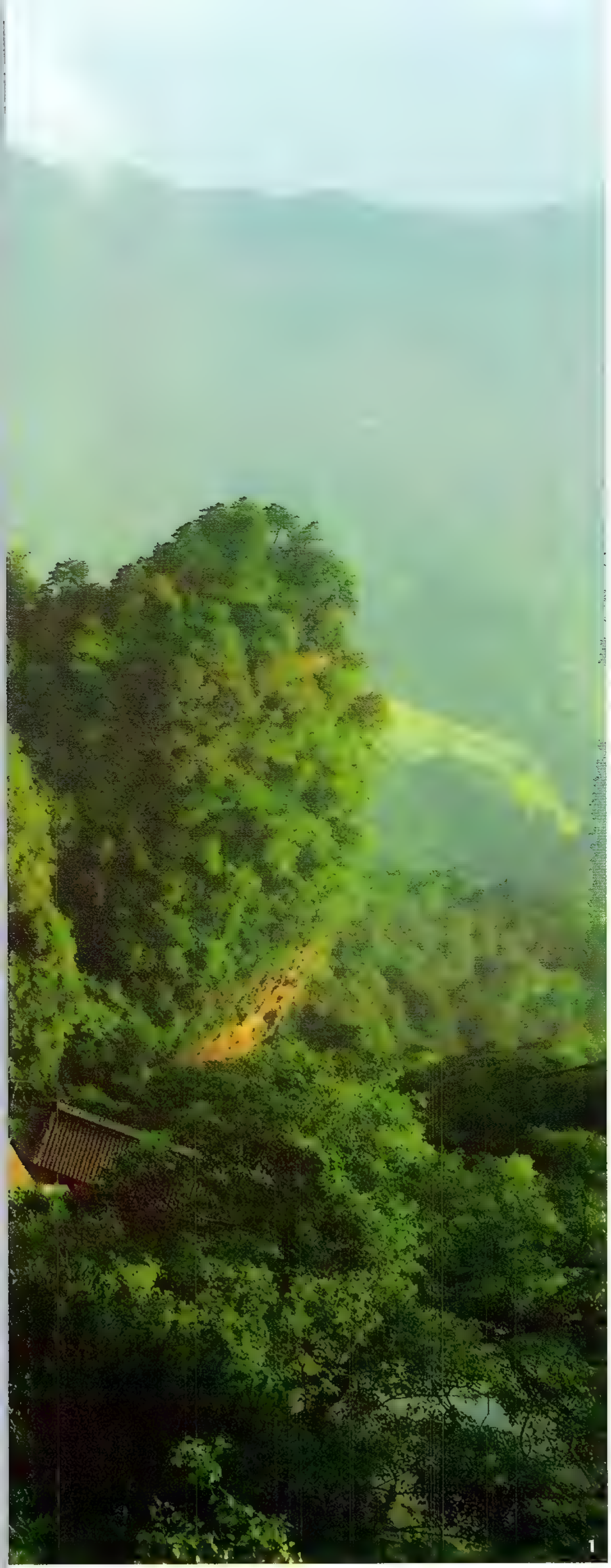
Playground of the Gods

Mount Wudang

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

Thanks to martial arts novels, even *Kungfu* novices are familiar with names like the Wudang Clan, Zhang Sanfeng, *Taichi*... In fact, Mount Wudang is a sacred mountain in Taoism, a place where spirituality has always reigned supreme. The nunneries and monasteries from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties on the mountain are brilliant amalgamations of art and religious architecture, so it's no wonder Mount Wudang is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site.

Situated in the southwest of Danjiangkou, a city in northwestern Hubei Province, Mount Wudang, also called Mount Taihe, is one of the sacred places in Taoism. Mount Wudang's ancient architecture was built in the Zhenguan period (627 — 649) of the Tang Dynasty, beginning with the oldest temple, Wulongci (Five Dragons Ancestral Hall), which represents the



commencement of the promotion of Taoism. By the time of the Song Dynasty (960 — 1279), the Wudang school of Taoism that directly served the royals came into being. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty (1271 — 1368), the Mount Wudang structures were heavily damaged but in the Ming Dynasty (1368 — 1644) Mount Wudang flourished, reaching its zenith in 1412 when the emperor Yongle sent 300,000 people to construct a huge cluster of buildings there.

After centuries of wear and tear, many of the palaces and monasteries are in ruins. The ancient architecture remains on Mount Wudang include Taihegong Palace and Nanyanggong Palace, as well as 200 other nunneries, monasteries, and halls comprise an area of 50,000 square metres, with a total area of over a million square metres.

■ Yuzhengong Palace

Gone in a Blaze of Indignity

Despite its convenient access, we did not visit Yuzhengong Palace because even though it stands in re-built splendour today — the real palace no longer exists. Its soul disappeared in that inferno five years ago.

Yuzhengong Palace, located in the north of Mount Wudang, is the initial meditation place of Zhang Sanfeng, the mystery figure who invented *Taichi*, and was a founding father of Taoism and also a recluse who avoided politics and refused to bend to authority. The Yongle emperor of the Ming Dynasty sent four imperial invitations for Zhang to come to the royal palace, but since Zhang never showed the emperor had this palace constructed in 1412. The emperor hoped to see Zhang here, but he was never able to encounter the true master.

In the evening of 19 January 2003, a fire broke out at Yuzhengong Palace, destroying the main hall. Analysis showed that tinder bursted into flame due to improper use of lighting by two tenants — a coach and a student at a martial arts school. In 1996, the third year that Mount Wudang became inscribed on the World Heritage sites list, the local authorities rented Yuzhengong Palace to a martial arts school for 15,000 yuan a year — a practice that was against the state regulations.

It's absurd that such precious World Heritage buildings could be ruined by a few money-hungry officials — renting it out for personal gain and devastating cultural preservation with their ignorance. The fire almost got Mount Wudang removed from the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites, besides nearly destroying China's dignity in regards to preservation of its own cultural heritage.

■ Zixiaogong Palace Where Royals Prayed

Once you enter the gates of Mount Wudang, many twists and turns await you. After what seems like endless bends on the environmentally friendly electrical trolley car, we arrived at the Zixiaogong Palace (palace of purple clouds) in half an hour.

Zixiaogong Palace is found below the Zhanqi Peak of Mount Wudang, historically known as 'the purple cloud land of luck'. This is where the Wudang Taoists prayed for luck for the royals, hence it enjoyed special status. Emperors of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties often ordered the building of altars here to pay respect to the gods. When the Jin army came south during

1. Looking down from Jinding Peak (Golden Roof), the Shizi Peak on the opposite side are enshrouded in clouds, while Zijincheng appears to be floating in the clouds.

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1&2. Thrilling martial arts performances below Zixiaodian.

3. All of the Taoist monasteries on Mount Wudang have the status of the Xuan Wu emperor, the 82nd reincarnation of Lao Zi, the Founder and Patriarch of Taoism.

4. Zixiaodadian in all its grandeur — a place that was in the past, off-limits to ordinary people.

5. Wudang Taoist music is an integral part of China's Taoist music and part of the country's intangible cultural heritage.

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the late Song Dynasty, the buildings here sustained heavy damage. At the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, the founding emperor Kublai Khan began a large-scale construction here to calm the masses. The biggest contributor though, was Ming emperor Zhu Di who, at the same time as building a royal palace (present Forbidden City) in Beijing, also invested heavily in Mount Wudang, erecting the Zixiaogong and Taihegong palaces.

There is a fascinating story about the emperor Zhu Di who was a great believer in the Xuan Wu god, also known as the Dark Lord of the North or the Lord of True Martiality. He asked painters to depict an image of this Northern God to be worshipped at Mount Wudang. Because the painters had never seen such a god — who was neither like the *Tathagata Buddha* nor *Avalokitesvara* — they could not get the likeness right; therefore they were executed. Finally, one painter had a bright idea — fawning on the emperor that in his dream an apparition of Xuan Wu appeared, looking just like the emperor himself. He requested to see the emperor and paint the portrait on the spot. Zhu Di, who had been bathing when he heard this great news, came out in a rush wearing a bathrobe, hence the painted image of the Xuan Wu god was barefoot with unruly hair.

Zixiao Dadian (main hall) is not only the sole double eaves, overhanging, gable roof wooden structure on Mount Wudang, but this sort of post and lintel wooden construction is also rare in Chinese architecture. In the old days, pilgrims could only reach as far as the prayer hall, as only the emperor's special emissaries were permitted to enter the main hall.

Nanyan Built on Precipitous Peaks

It is about 2.5 kilometres from Zixiaogong Palace to the terminus Wuyaling, a rather bustling tourism town. The electrical trolley car sends hordes of tourists to its large car park, which is surrounded by so many hotels, shops and restaurants — you're about as far removed from spirituality as you can get here.

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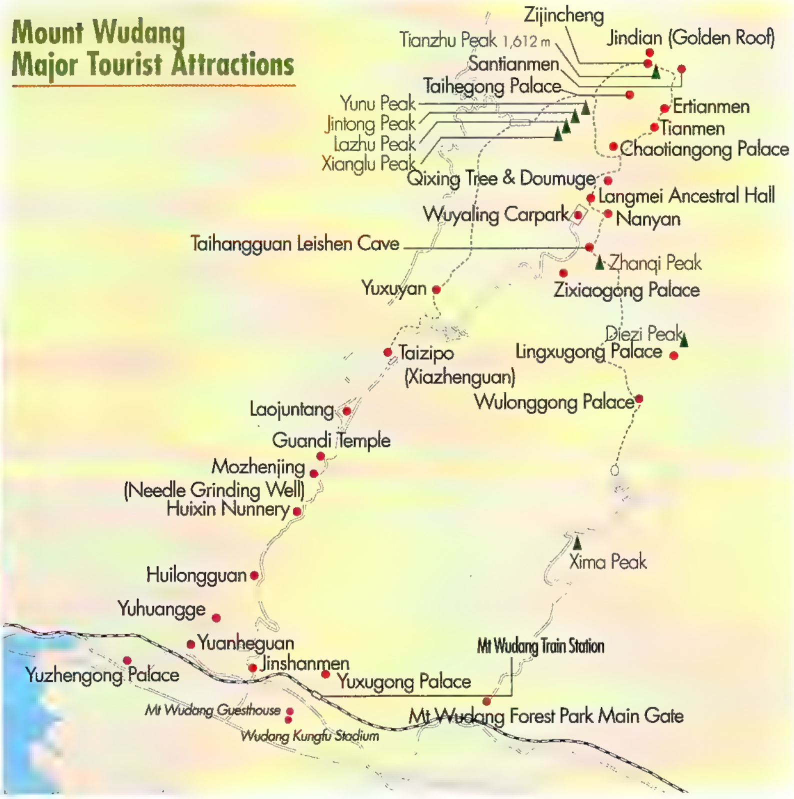
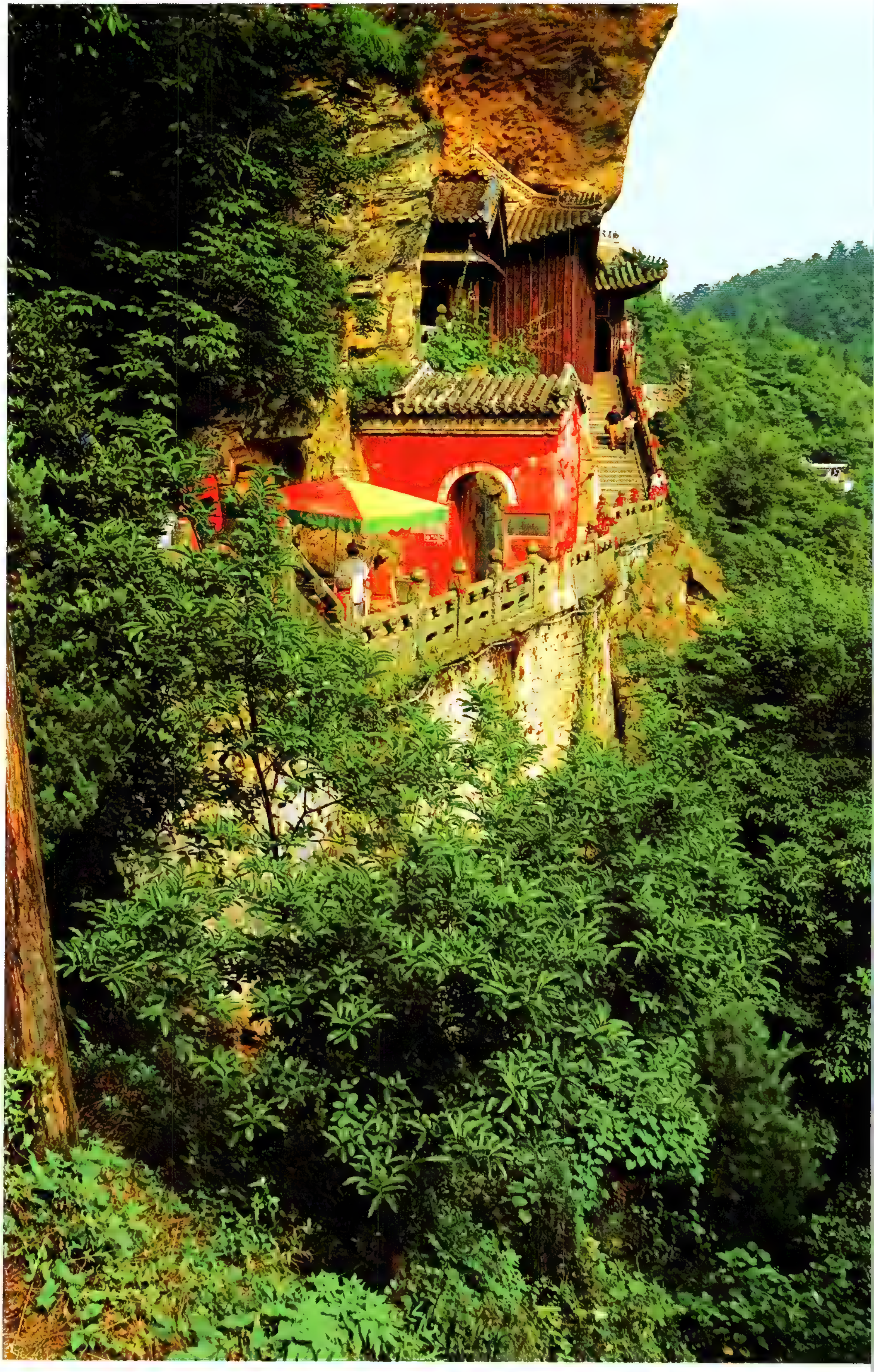
The name Wuyaling (raven hill) aroused my curiosity, so I found out from the hotel manager that the raven is the lucky bird of Mount Wudang. The hills here used to be gathering places for ravens — darkening the sky with their ebony wings — and pilgrims would throw food up to the sky so that ravens' accurate catches became an attraction


Mount Wudang Major Tourist Attractions
Zijincheng
Tianzhu Peak 1,612 m
Jindian (Golden Roof)
Santianmen
Taihegong Palace
Yunu Peak
Jintong Peak
Lazhu Peak
Xianglu Peak
Ertianmen
Tianmen
Chaotiangong Palace
Qixing Tree & Doumuge
Langmei Ancestral Hall
Wuyaling Carpark
Nanyan
Taihangguan Leishen Cave
Zhanqi Peak
Yuxuyan
Zixiaogong Palace
Diezi Peak
Taizipo
(Xiazhenguan)
Lingxugong Palace
Wulonggong Palace
Laojuntang
Guandi Temple
Mozhenjing
(Needle Grinding Well)
Huixin Nunnery
Xima Peak
Huilongguan
Yuhuangge
Yuanheguan
Jinshanmen
Mt Wudang Train Station
Yuzhengong Palace
Yuxugong Palace
Mt Wudang Guesthouse
Wudang Kungfu Stadium
Mt Wudang Forest Park Main Gate



1. Nanyan Stone Palace is perched on a cliff, the most beautiful of all 36 rocky sights of Mount Wudang.

2. Countless brass locks are a special Wudang sight.

3. Mount Wudang's porters work hard carrying heavy loads all day for very little pay.

4. The lookout point below Zijincheng is also full of brass locks.

5. Taichangguan Monastery in Nanyan area is mainly for meditation and doesn't get many tourists.

6. Lighting a dragon-head incense is very dangerous; many people have fallen to their deaths here.

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itself. The reason ravens were so favoured is because when the Xuan Wu god first came to the mountain, ravens led the way, then while Xuan Wu was meditating here, the birds served as wake-up callers. Once Xuan Wu became immortalised, he named them 'immortal ravens'. Later, as the number of pilgrims dwindled, the ravens had less food and naturally stopped coming.

Upwards from the car park, past Nantian Gate, you'll soon reach Nanyan — a place as beautifully lush as it is dangerous. Of all the 36 rocky sights of Mount Wudang, Nanyan is the most breathtaking. Further on is the Zhenqinggong Palace, built in the Yuan Dynasty, the most imposing of all Mount Wudang edifices. Built on the edge of such treacherous cliffs, the entire structure — all of the beams and pillars, doors and windows, brackets and arches — are carved from black stone. The heaviest structure weighs more than five tonnes, and so it would have been a staggering feat to lift it up onto the cliff.

Outside the stone palace there is a stone beam which is even more thrilling, extending three metres into the air and carved with winding dragons. Legend has it that Xuan Wu god often rode it on his patrols. There is an incense burner at the tip of the dragon's head — the famous 'dragonhead

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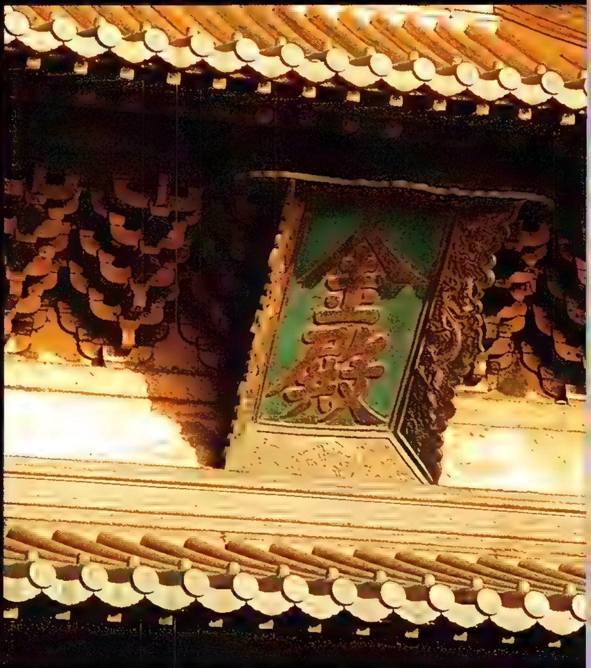
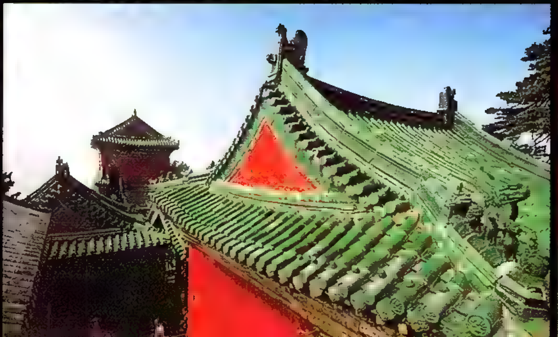

金殿



incense'. Throughout history, there have been many over-zealous pilgrims who climbed onto the 30-centimetre wide dragon head to light incense and offer prayer, in spite of the danger; countless have fallen and lost their lives.

Chaotiangong Palace
Separating Mortals and Immortals

After lunch, we started to head for Jinding — the golden roof or golden summit.

Setting off from Wuyaling, we first went downwards, passing Meilang Ancestral Temple, a small row of buildings along the hill, and then we began to climb. The ascent was much longer than expected and the higher you went, the steeper the paths became. Thankfully there were plenty of sights on the way which, along with the frequent appearance of food vendors, broke up the hike and made it seem less exhausting.

Mid-way there is a Chaotiangong Palace (Heavenly-prayer Palace), which supposedly separates the worlds of man and god; any higher up and it's heaven. It's said that in the past, ordinary pilgrims would stop here and not go on further, and of course, the gods wouldn't come down either because they would then become mortals. Now with the development of tourism, one doesn't need a visa to visit the gods' territory. After Chaotiangong Palace, the forests get thicker and mistier until you are wrapped by a wet coldness, as if in the frigid breath of the gods. The more you climb, the thicker the fog and mist. Once you pass through three 'Heavenly Gates', you are in 'Tianting' or the heavenly square proper. Finally you reach Mount Wudang — Tianzhu Peak. Look up and true to its name, the Tianzhu — heavenly pole — towers over all the other peaks.

Zijincheng The High and Mighty

A night-time stroll on the mountain is a must — the moon is suspended in the velvety blue night, and all the flying rafters, upturned cornices,

Left page: Mount Wudang is included on the list of UNESCO world cultural heritage sites because of its ancient and unique architecture.

Above: A rolling sea of clouds brings with it ever-changing vistas, rendering Jinding a genuine paradise.

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pavilions and railings are silhouetted against the sky. The Taoist monks' rooms are brightly lit but all are silent, except for the occasional knocking of the night watchman. Even the air seems still, as if one is in heaven.

We spent the night at Jinding Guesthouse, and certainly couldn't complain about the rates — 100 yuan.

Zijincheng was built in 1419 during Yongle reign of Ming Dynasty. Its perimeter of 344 metres long surrounds the Tianzhu Peak, with walls made of stone blocks that each weigh hundreds of kilograms. Upon entering, you'll see the Dayue Taihe Hall whose name indicates it is one of China's five Yue (great mountains) and this one — named 'Dayue' — shows it's obviously superior to the other great mountains. Thereafter, there were nine thresholds and 164 steps — referred to as the nine continuous ascents — in this most steep part of Mount Wudang. I was taking photographs on the way up when I saw an aged Taoist monk with his hands on the iron chain, climbing up with some difficulty. As he passed by, with his long beard glistening in the rising sun and his hunched back resembling a mountain, it was a moving sight.

Before meeting the old man, there were other pilgrims who had waited outside Zijincheng, and as soon as the gates opened at 5:30 am they rushed up Jinding to light the first incense of the day.

Wudang Trivia

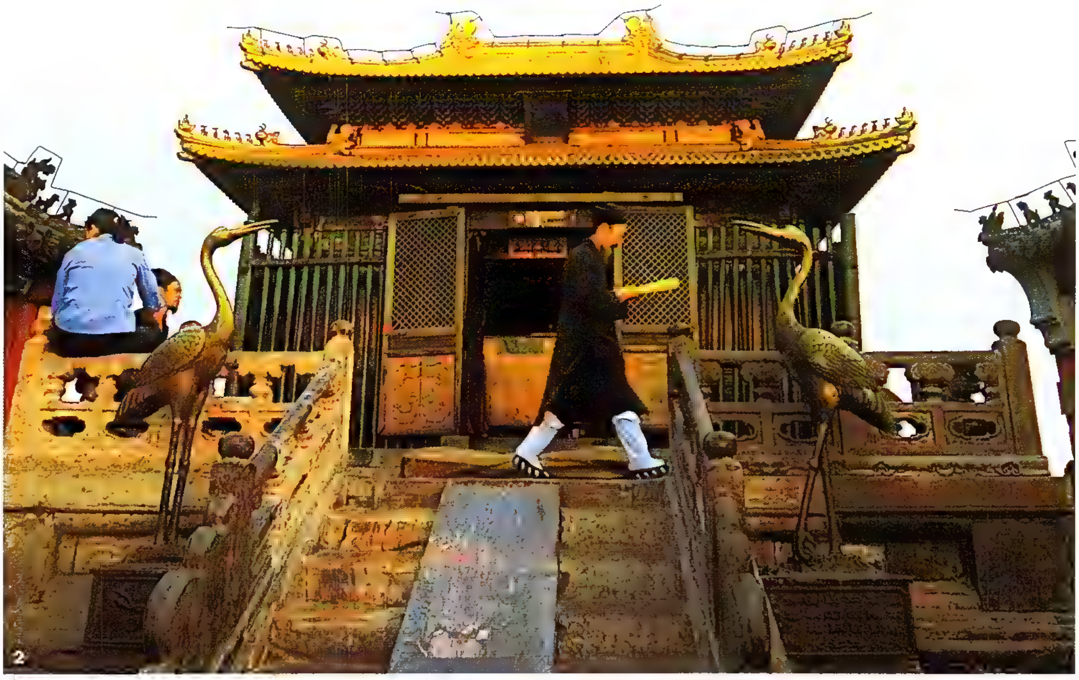
Blessing: Many people visit Mount Wudang and buy religious souvenirs, like amulets and deity images. One can find the Taoist monk on duty at Golden Palace and ask him to bless the objects. He would bring the objects before the Zhen Wu emperor statue, and according to the Taoist ceremony, circle a few times quite formally, to give a blessing. It's said that only blessed images and amulets are effective.

Stamping: Some believers bring their own scent bags and golden cloth to enter the Huangjingtang (Royal Scriptures Hall) and ask the Taoist monk on duty to put emperor Zhen Wu's jade stamp, with words like 'Dutian dafa zhibao (都天大法之寶)', on them. Needless to say, the stamped object brings even greater satisfaction to the believer.

Lock-hanging: Hanging locks has become a must-do at Mount Wudang. Millions of brass locks are a tourist attraction themselves on the mountain. The locks, in a myriad of sizes and shapes, are inscribed with characters like 'peace', 'longevity', 'family happiness', and 'hearts together forever'. Every lock-hanger would inscribe his or her own name and date. Another common feature of the locks is that there are no keys — once locked, it cannot be opened again. Of course, there are so many locks on the mountaintop that workers have to clear away some old locks every few months to make way for new locks.

The Golden Palace A One-off Miracle

The Jindian (Golden Palace) is the heart and soul of the Jinding (Golden Summit). It was built in 1416, Ming's Yongle period, and while small, at less than 20 square metres, it is significant in mass. Cast from 20 tonnes of refined copper and 300 kilograms of gold in Beijing, and then transported



to Mount Wudang, this is China's largest remaining gilded copper palace. A total of 68 exquisite copper carved animals stand guard on the eaves. The palace also houses a 10-tonne 'Emperor Zhen Wu' gilded copper statue.

The stone railing that surrounds the palace is also unique, with unusual textures and colours. It wasn't until the 1990s that scientists discovered these stones were trilobite fossils from 450 million years ago originated in the seabed. The most magical thing is when lightning strikes all around the palace it doesn't do any damage at all; on the contrary, the lightning actually removes smoke, dust and rust, so the palace shines like new and the four walls around the palace are also scrubbed clean. It's as if the heavens have volunteered to give the palace a good cleaning. When Mount Wudang was being evaluated as a UNESCO World Heritage site, Golden Palace installed lightning rods, so 'lightning and thunder tempering the Golden Palace' is a phenomenon that will never be seen again.

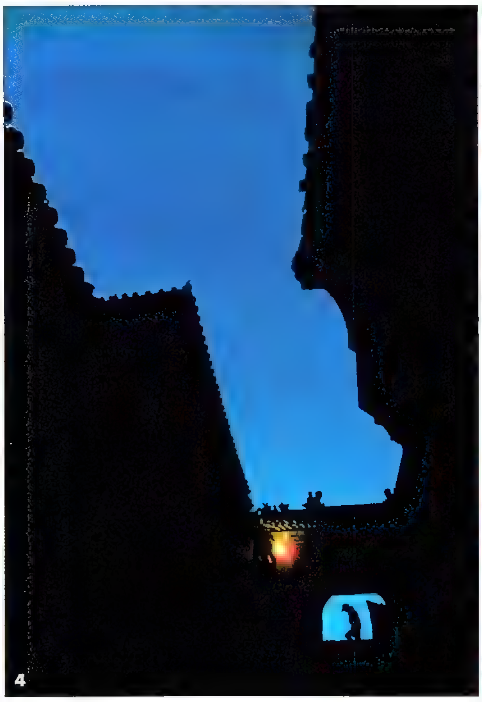
1. The old Taoist monk climbed with some difficulty but Jinding or 'Golden Summit' was already in his sights.

2. Golden Palace is the most sacred architecture on Jinding.

3. The first light of day sees ardent pilgrims already on Jinding to light the first incense.

4. Early morning, the gates of Zijincheng open and a day's meditation begins.

5. Pilgrims carefully folding the paper gold nuggets and tossing them into the incense burner.



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1. After a rainy afternoon turned sunny, reflections of the Golden Palace appeared amidst the clouds and fog — the 'God's light' is one of the ancient eight sights of Mount Wudang.

2. Many come to pay their respects to the Prince's Palace, where emperor Zhen Wu studied and later achieved spectacular success.

3. The most exquisite architectural feat on Taizipo – one pillar with twelve beams.

Around 5 pm, we got ready to leave and suddenly the masses of clouds started to drop. Directly to the east a coloured halo began to appear, we appeared in the halo and when we waved, the apparition also waved. A few of us saw it at the same time — we all saw ourselves. We shouted excitedly, 'the Buddha lights, Buddha lights!' But a Taoist monk nearby corrected us, saying, it's the God's light. We then realised the truth in this sacred Taoist mountain, even the same weather phenomenon goes by different terminology.

Soon, the halos disappeared and balls of clouds receded and dissipated, leaving the Golden Palace behind us reflected in the dying rays of the sun. We could still make out colourful halos as the clouds moved to and fro, changing the palace reflections also changed in size over 10 minutes. The ending was even more spectacular, with a thin layer of cloud clinging to the ground. One could almost make out the ground cover, but the Golden Palace's shadow in the clouds was magnified, with far away hills also in the reflection. Finally the clouds disappeared entirely taking the reflections with them.

The Taoist monk saw my photos and was equally astonished — he said this is the 'Golden Palace reflection'— one of the eight wondrous sights of Jinding that rarely seen.

■ Taizipo Pillar with Twelve Beams

On the way down, we heard that Taizipo had very special architecture — especially the pillar with twelve beams — so we went to have a look.

In primary school, we learned the story about grinding an iron pole into a needle. So we had to see the real 'needle grinding well' or Mozhenjing, which was a huge steel pole standing in the quiet courtyard. It was as thick as a cannon, making one wonder — at such a huge size, how can it ever be ground into a needle?

Taizipo does have a different architecture to everywhere else, as it was built according to the slope's inclination and each mountain gate reveals different sceneries. Ever more marvels of Taoist architecture extend into the verdant greenery, including the Wuyunlou (Five-cloud Tower) which is widely thought to be an architectural masterpiece. The building has a column at one corner supporting 12 crisscrossing girders and beams, making it one of the finest examples of the Ming Dynasty's Taoist architecture and showing the key role Taoism plays in Chinese history and culture. After more than 500 years, the large wooden structure is still as sturdy as ever; above the Scriptures Library at the top is Taizidian or Prince's Hall, where a hundred years old date tree on the right of the stone steps is full of red cloth strips. Tourists who come here with children ponder and pray before tying their hopes for their children on the trees. There was a painting of the prince, the young Zhen Wu emperor, studying in the Prince's Hall, holding a book of scriptures in diligent study.

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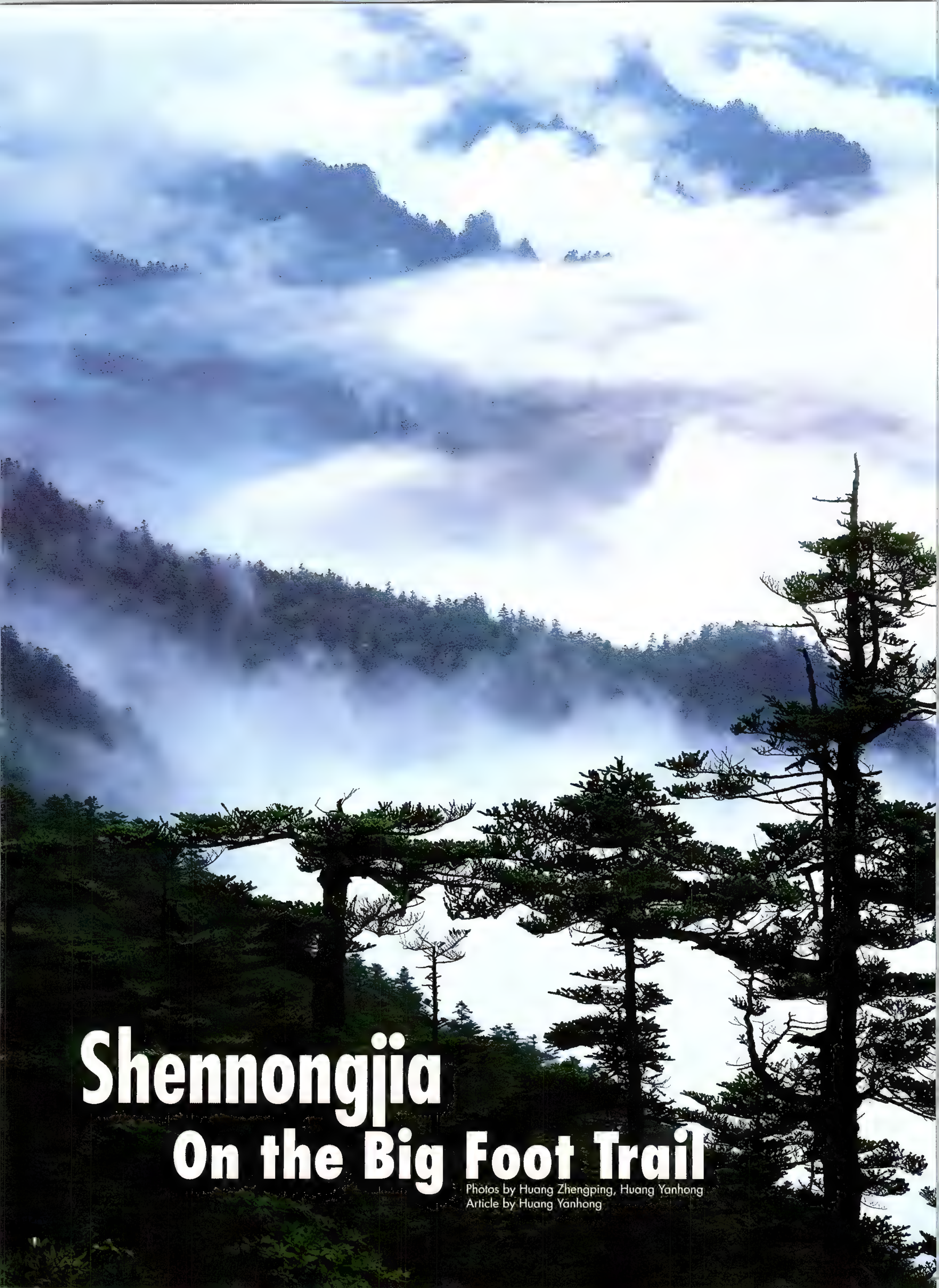
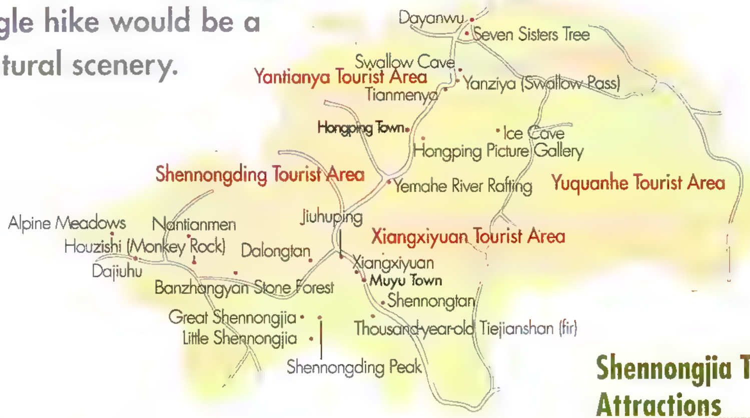


Shennongjia

On the Big Foot Trail

Photos by Huang Zhengping, Huang Yanhong
Article by Huang Yanhong

As much as you want to avoid clichés, once in Shennongjia, even if you don't want to mention the legendary Big Foot, people will swear in absolute terms what Big Foot is like. Shennongjia and Big Foot seem inseparable. So, I also 'did as the Romans did' and followed the trails of Big Foot. I thought that even if I didn't find anything, the jungle hike would be a smorgasbord of Shennongjia's unspoilt natural scenery.


Dayanwu
Seven Sisters Tree
Swallow Cave
Yantianya Tourist Area
Yanziya (Swallow Pass)
Tianmenya
Hongping Town
Ice Cave
Hongping Picture Gallery
Shennongding Tourist Area
Yemahe River Rafting
Yuquanhe Tourist Area
Alpine Meadows
Nantianmen
Jiuhuping
Xiangxiyuan Tourist Area
Houzishi (Monkey Rock)
Dalongtan
Dajiuhu
Xiangxiyuan
Muyu Town
Banzhangyan Stone Forest
Shennongtan
Great Shennongjia
Little Shennongjia
Thousand-year-old Tiejianshan (fir)
Shennongding Peak

Five thousand years ago, Shennong was born here — a tribal leader who tasted hundreds of herbs to test their medicinal value. Later, he became the Yan emperor — one of the ancestors of the Chinese race, Shennong Race, hence the name Shennongjia (meaning Shennong Scaffold).

The more than 3,000-square-kilometre virgin forests is not just home to thousands types of flora and fauna, but also countless mysteries. Because of the appearance of Big Foot, Shennongjia is China's most mysterious region and also one of the world's four great unsolved mysteries (Big Foot, UFOs — flying saucers and aliens, the Loch Ness monster and the Bermuda triangle).

Over the past few decades, there have been more than 100 sightings of Big Foot in the Shennongjia forest park and over 400 witnesses, but nobody has been able to photograph Big Foot, nor catch Big Foot.

As time went on, news about Big Foot died down, and Shennongjia gradually receded from media attention. In fact, without Big Foot's starring bill, Shennongjia is a thrill, a minute performance on its own. With its mostly preserved virgin forests, excitement and enjoyment abound deep in the woods — something rave in present China.

Even if you start with doubts and a sceptical eye, once on the road, you can't help hoping to see the elusive Big Foot. It's not just me, I asked other tourists and they say everyone feels the same.

We left Shiyan City and headed south through the forest park's roads, which are in very good condition. After more than two hours, we entered Shennongjia, the forests became denser, and we became more alert. If we ran into Big Foot, or took a photograph of Big Foot, wouldn't it cause a sensation? There is no lack of Big Foot related information: two metres tall, walks like a human, no tail, covered in dark red fur... In 1977, a scientific expedition went deep into Shennongjia, where they discovered Big Foot's hair, its sleeping quarters, faeces and footprints. The holes were sheltered, facing the sun and dry, while the faeces were full of bamboo shoots, wild berries and the fur of small animals, making it an omnivore. The footprints were huge, so it should be quite well-built...

■ A Big Foot Attack Best Left Forgotten

Fang County was once a sleepy town but something happened to put it in the spotlight.

Once we got out of the county, we began asking about a name —Yan Hongfa. Almost everyone knew him, and what was strange was that everyone

Shennongjia Tourist Attractions

1. Look out from Shennongding Peak, Shennongjia forest park's vastness is apparent. (by Huang Zhengping)

2. The fall colours of Shennongjia are intoxicatingly beautiful. (by Huang Zhengping)

3. The legendary Shennongjia Big Foot looks like this, believe it or not. (by Luo Yongbin)

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smiled knowingly before telling us directions.

Back in Shiyan, local friends told us about Yan — an ordinary villager who, on the first of May, 1974 went to Qingnong Village to cut vines after breakfast and heard sounds behind him. He looked back towards the footsteps and saw a strange monster covered in long brown fur — running over at lightning speed on two feet — fur flying and all. In an instant the monster grabbed him. Thinking fast in that moment of mortal danger, he lifted his machete and hacked the monster's right arm, sending it running off into the bushes, howling with pain…

According to Yan's descriptions, this monster was about four feet tall, with hair down to its neck, round red eyes, protruding brow bones, wide mouth, arms that came down to its waist, large hands… This was the first strange animal sighting in such detail at Shennongjia forest park, and so immediately he was in the national and international spotlight.

It wasn't easy to find Yan Hongfa but after asking around seven or eight times, we finally got to his home in Qiaoshang Village. The door was open, an old man sat inside.

'Are you Mr. Yan?'

'No, I'm not. He lives up there.' The man pointed to the gully.

'You must be 80 years old?' We heard that Yan was nearly 50 when he encountered Big Foot.

'No, I'm in my 60s.' The old man said without even looking at us. I was convinced that he was the man we were looking for. He was obviously wary of strangers.

To ease the tension, I said — we'll pay 100 yuan and dine at your home, is that alright? He quickly agreed. We stopped asking him anything about Big Foot, began washing the pan, vegetables, clearing up the messy cooker and made a meal for ourselves. The old man said he had already eaten and told us to eat ourselves.

He didn't object to our photographing of him, just saying in a low voice, 'It's no use photographing me, I'm not the man you're looking for.'

After we ate, we were getting ready to leave and the old man's eldest son, who lives nearby, came over. He inadvertently revealed that his father was Yan Hongfa. He told us that when his father ran into Big Foot, and the physical struggle that ensued left him injured and frightened. It took months of bed rest for him to recover. On the way out, I saw the machete. His son said that someone once tried to pay a high price for it but his father refused to sell it.

Even after leaving the old man, I still couldn't figure out why he was so tight-lipped about it — was it the locals' gossip or harassment from outsiders? On the way back, I noticed that at the gully there was now a tourist attraction called Big Foot Valley, which surely had something to do with the old man's fame.

After a hundred kilometres of hilly roads, the bus came to Yanziya. The cave, situated at an altitude of 2,400 metres, is about 20 metres in height, with the main cave being 3.7 kilometres deep. There are tens of thousands of Himalayan swiftlets that live in the caves, about a dozen metres in where it's pitch dark. After the rainbow bridge, you'll come to the Big Foot Cave, which has a single iron chain hung on the cliff and a string of small foot platforms. Only the truly brave would attempt to climb it.

Scared to Death for Three Days

There are two townships in Shennongjia — one of them is Songbai. It is where the local

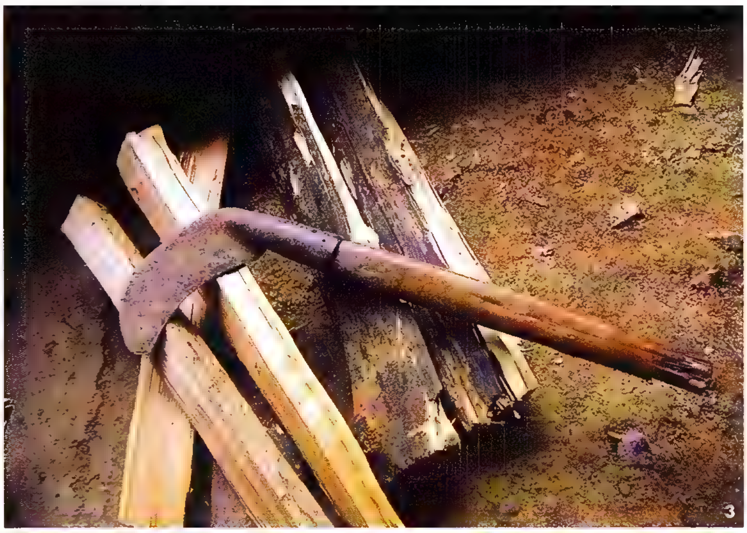
1. Hongpinggu is a picturesque valley. (by Huang Zhengping)

2. Mr. Yan to this day is reluctant to retell his dangerous encounter with Big Foot. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. The machete used to fight Big Foot some thirty years ago. (by Huang Yanhong)

4. Shuai Daifu's daughter told us her father was working on the mountain. (by Huang Yanhong)

5. Shuai Daifu rakes leaves from the forest to line the cow shed. (by Huang Yanhong)



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government located.

Xiao Luo, who works in the propaganda department, is also a Big Foot witness. He recalled his meeting with Big Foot two years ago; being experienced, he called on other passengers from the car so he was not the only eye-witness. He did not play up this experience, not wanting others to think he was ramping up his own publicity, instead he introduced us to another eye-witness, Shuai Daifu.

We found Shuai Daifu in the No.4 group of Honghe Village, Hongping Town. He lives in beautiful and serene surroundings but he doesn't have time to appreciate all, which is ordinary to him anyway. He has many worries on his mind — raising pigs and cattle, tending the land, building a new house...

He was surprised when we asked him about Big Foot, and wanted to know how we knew and how we found him.

Then he told us what happened a few decades ago, 'When I was little, I went cattle-herding with another kid, and there is a very deep crater, nobody had ever been down there. We were bored, so we started throwing rocks into the hole, but suddenly a monster jumped out to grab us. The monster was not wearing any clothes, and it was fully covered with yellow hair and had thick fingers. We ran for our lives, and I was in front because I was taller; the other kid was three years older but smaller than me, and so he followed behind. When Big Foot was about to get him, he quickly pulled out the machete he had strapped to his waist and scared the monster away.

'When I got home, I had literally lost my wits. My family asked me what happened and I said, "I've run into a monster." I suffered from constant nightmares and kept blabbering strange nonsense. The other kid was the same. After that we never saw the monster again, and we never dared to go near that crater again.'

I listened closely to the old man's story from his simple face and honest eyes, I could not detect any lies. Besides, he gained nothing by retelling this story.

Sights Right Outside the Window

Heading south from the picturesque Hongpinggu, the journey was filled with pleasant surprises — Yemahe, Xiaotianmen, nameless waterfalls and wonderful peaks. We could not bring ourselves to speed through it; in fact, we spent more than two hours on just 15 kilometres, stopping to 'smell the roses' many times.

We passed Xiangxiyuan along the way. This is the source of Xiangxi Creek, which ends up flowing into the Xiling Gorge, part of the Yangtze River's Three Gorges. The areas around Xiangxiyuan are even more beautiful with tea-bush covered hills and charming cottages sometimes hidden by a curtain of clouds. The conditions are perfect for tea — around 1,000 metres in altitude, foggy and misty throughout the year, and with excellent soil.

Right there and then we decided to stay here. Soon we found Qingtianpao Resort on a hilly bend, with expansive views and tea plantations all around. At sunset, we could sip some fragrant tea in the elegant teahouse while taking in vistas of the tea plantations. What a pleasure!

The night in Qingtianpao offered one of the best sleeps we'd had in ages. Birds were our natural wake-up call, the air outside was clean and refreshing, and the view was amazing — an eyeful of lush greenery, wafting clouds and fog... When I decided to take photographs, I only had to open the window — a perk of staying in such scenic surrounds.

Shennong — a Great Chinese Inventor

Muyu Town is where the Shennongjia Nature Reserve Protection Bureau is located. We spotted the charming town on the way down. Neat, elegant, nestled in the valley, with cool sweet Xiangxi Creek water to drink, life here must be happy.

We entered Muyu, a town with a distinctive leisure resort feel, finding rows of quaint old shops ready to cater to tourists.

We went from Muyu to the Shenongtan. Obviously, Shennongtan (Altar) was built in honour of Shennong. Climb 300 steps to the hilltop and you'll see a gigantic statue showing Shennong, with a man's torso and bull's head, overlooking the mountains. The sculpture's eyes are both closed and there are two 10-metre high totem poles standing on either side of the altar.

Shennong was not just the god of medicine who tasted hundreds of herbs, but also the earliest Chinese inventor. The eight sets of murals on the each side of the altar show his great inventions, including cultivated grains, improved farming tools, pottery, medicine, planned communities, markets, etc. Each year at Double Ninth Festival (the ninth

1. Shennongjia in late autumn — the rich foliage is about to be replaced by the silver colours of winter. (by Huang Zhengping)

2. Yanziya is now a tourism hot spot, with a giant rainbow-like pedestrian overpass. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. The very high Big Foot Cave is a test of tourists' courage. (by Huang Yanhong)

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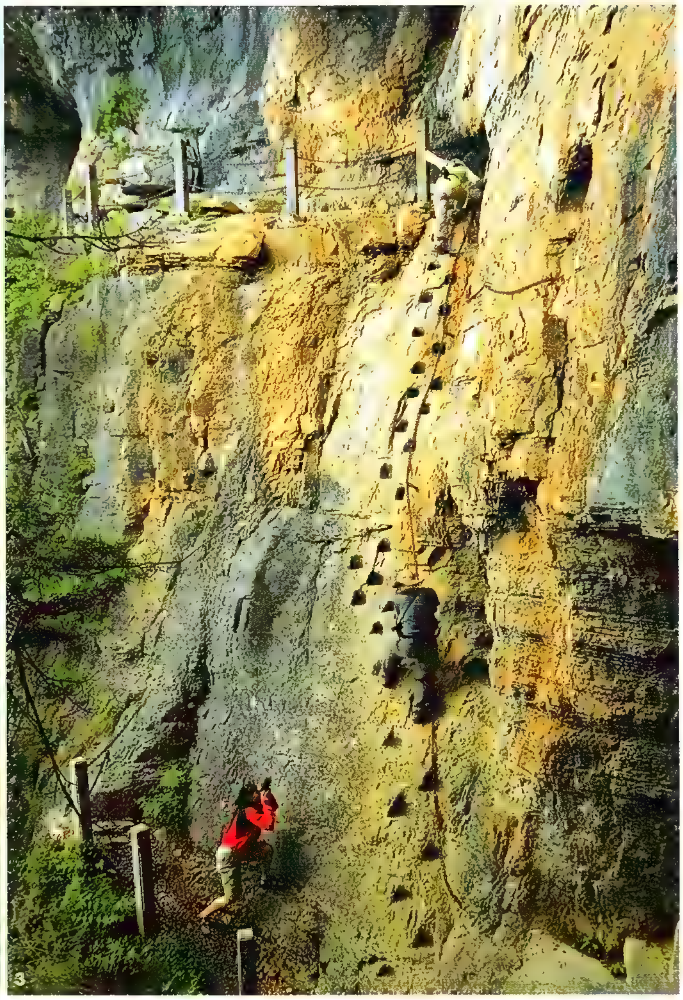
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1. Shennong Tan's thousand year old tree is a receptacle for people's good wishes. (photo by Huang Yanhong)

2. Dalongtan is frequented by golden monkeys. (photo by Huang Zhengping)

3. The magnificent Shennongtan is where worship rituals are held to commemorate Shennong. (photo by Huang Yanhong)

day of the ninth month of the lunar calendar), grand worshipping rituals are held here.

From Qingtianpao, 10 kilometres of winding roads will take you to Yazizui, the entrance to the entire Shennongjia scenic area. Not far into the scenic area is an intersection, and to the right is Dalongtan, once the base camp for Shennongjia Big Foot expeditions. Field expedition displays here show the main achievements of two expeditions, including the Big Foot hair, faeces, bamboo shelter and Big Foot footprints collected on-site.

The Dalongtan area is frequented by snub-nosed monkeys (or golden monkeys), which explains why the golden monkey research base was set up here. These creatures have been around for 1.5 million years and they are a protected species unique to China. What's interesting is that they even share a Chinese trait — the fondness for siestas.

■ Banzhangyan — Another Big Foot Haunt

Shennongding is the highest peak in the forest area, standing at 3,105 metres above sea level, the southern slope is steeper than the northern

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one. Even though the weather was not ideal, we headed for the peak, starting off from an altitude of 2,660 metres. The strong wind carried with it ribbons of rain as we stepped into the knee-high grass of alpine meadows. There were also hundreds of hectares of arrow bamboo forests, some of which had already died.

Once we passed the 2,880-metre altitude mark, the arrow bamboo became denser. We continued to climb and saw alpine azaleas and firs, growing every way on the slopes. Underfoot it was muddy, and aside from branches and vines, there were also mossy rocks challenging our ascent so that we had to use both hands and feet to climb. Further upwards, barren rocks became the primary scenery, with moss and ferns as underlay — a primitive land indeed.

When we reached the peak, it was time to take some deep breaths. As we expected, all around was covered in clouds and mist, with visibility at a minimum. There isn't a lot on Shennong Peak, just

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1. The serpentine mountain pass is so windy, where the exposed rocks are blown into snow sculptures. (by Huang Zhengping)

2. Heading for Shennong Peak in strong wind. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. Shennong camp's grass huts were built a few years ago but Big Foot has yet to move in. (by Huang Yanhong)

4. The mist adds to the 'mystique' of Shennong Peak. (by Huang Yanhong)

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a tall metal platform on the northwest side at 2,900 metres altitude, used to watch for forest fires. A family of three lives below the platform.

Banzhangyan is another place where Big Foot has been known to appear. Its terrain is so hard to navigate and many people have disappeared here, so there are bold signs warning tourists not to stray from the guided paths.

Li Guohua, who took part in the former expeditions, now works at the research unit of the reserve. In 1980 he had seen Big Foot three times here. The most unforgettable time was in winter, at dusk, when he found Big Foot and quietly approached. Li got so close he could see Big Foot's facial features, but he stumbled on a tree branch, whereupon Big Foot fled quickly. Li held up his shot gun, hoping to injure Big Foot and capture him alive but having been so long outdoors, the gunpowder became damp and none of his three shots fired.

We left Banzhangyan and continued further on but due to the torrential rains, the roads to Dajiuhu had collapsed and our trip came to a halt.

Translated by Cheng Lei

4

Western Hubei Travel Tips

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

Yantianya

Enshi

Long Distance Transport

By air: Fly to Wuhan, then fly to Enshi Xujiaping Airport; there are two services daily, one in the morning, another in the afternoon; tickets are around 560 yuan and usually no discounts are offered.

Enshi flights are mostly within the province, to places such as Wuhan and Yichang; the only inter-province destination served is Chongqing; airplanes are all Chinese made small planes.

The Enshi Xujiaping Airport is not far from the city, less than 10 yuan taxi ride away.

Ticket outlets include the Minhang Hotel, No.42 Hangkong Road in Enshi downtown, or Qingjiang Travel Agency, second floor of the front building of Qingjiang Guesthouse, on No.4, Wuyang Main Street.

By road: There are buses to Enshi from the Wuhan long distance bus station; the 300-kilometre route goes through steep mountains, treacherous cliffs and takes 13~14 hours; ordinary sleeper tickets cost 100 yuan, air-conditioned sleeper bus costs an extra 50 yuan; the ordinary sleeper to Yichang costs 60 yuan and takes 12 hours.

Enshi bus terminal is at Jiemei Bridge over the Qingjiang river at the west end of Wuyang Main Street; long-distance buses also depart from the Qingjiang Guesthouse Service Centre at No.4, Wuyang Main Street.

Aside from buses, at the terminal there are also chartered cars to Yichang; the six-hour journey costs 580 yuan / car, or 145 yuan / passenger; the cars will leave when all four seats are filled.

City Transport

Enshi has shuttles to various tourist attractions, but some services to the more remote areas do not run according to a set timetable; only when buses are filled will they depart so if there aren't enough passengers, the bus will not run; within Enshi the taxis start at 2 yuan, with an extra 0.5 yuan fuel surcharge; there are also motorised pedicabs running around, charging 2 yuan per ride for all downtown areas.

Accommodation

Enshi City is small but, since it boasts a large number of mid- to low-end hotels and inns, finding accommodation is easy given the choice. The best ones include Qingjiang Guesthouse, Xidu Guesthouse and Minhang Guesthouse. The cheapest is the No.2 building of the Qingjiang Guesthouse, only 60 yuan after discount; in addition, there are many small hotels and guesthouses in Enshi that are quite clean and neat, charging around 15 yuan per night.

Hotel info:

Qingjiang Building (718) 822 2658 No. 4 Wuyang Main Street

Xidu Building (718) 823 9108 No. 33 Hangkong Road

Minhang Hotel (718) 822 5370 No. 43 Hangkong Road

Mt Wudang

Long Distance Transport

By rail: Mt Wudang train station has services to Beijing, Wuchang, Xiangfan, Ankang and Shiyan; Liuliping and Shiyan train stations are accessed to Wuhan, Chongqing, Beijing, Zhengzhou, Shanghai, Xiamen, Guangzhou and others. There are many trains from Wuhan to Shiyan; one can either get off at Liuliping, or take a bus from Shiyan to Liuliping; the suggested train is N372, which departs Wuchang at 10:30 pm, arriving at 6 am the next morning in Liuliping.

By road: Buses usually arrive in Shiyan first; highways connect Shiyan and Mt Wudang town. In addition, the Hanshi Road traverses Mt Wudang, making transport convenient. In addition, there are some tourist bus companies that provide services to Wudang from cities along the way; most local hotels and travel agencies also have their own tourist bus fleets.

Shiyan's south bus terminal operates many shuttles to the Mt Wudang scenic area which take 2 hours; from Liuliping station to Mt Wudang though is only half an hour.

Taizipo

Scenic Area Transport

There are many buses to Mt Wudang from the town of Mt Wudang; usually buses from Mt Wudang town to Nanyan depart once the seats are filled; the half hour journey costs 10 yuan.

On Mt Wudang itself, sedan chairs are available, at the stone steps going from Nanyan to Jindian; travelling a dozen kilometres will set you back 80 yuan. There are also cable cars, stopping at Qiongtai Zhongguan and another station between Xiuqiu Peak and Shizi (or Lion) Peak, about 100 metres below

Enshi's Selenium Tea and Friendship

Article by Zhang Hongwai

Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture lies at the junction of Hubei, Hunan provinces and Chongqing city.

In the middle of 1999, I met the general manager of an Enshi trade company in Wuhan. When he heard that I had a kidney transplant in 1994 and had high blood pressure from taking lots of medicine, he strongly recommended that I start drinking 'Selenium Tea' from Enshi.

Selenium is a natural trace element that, according to recent international research, helps flush out toxins, delays the ageing process and lowers blood pressure.

Enshi is known as 'the world's selenium capital', and has the world's only independent selenium mine and a rich reserve. Enshi is also a major tea-producer, so its teas are higher in selenium than tea from anywhere else in China.

My friend gave me ten big packs of Enshi selenium tea and made me promise to drink it. After I got back to Hong Kong, I started drinking Enshi selenium tea everyday, after about half a year, my blood pressure came down to an average of 135/90 from the original 160/110! Since my Enshi friend heard about that, he sends me 10 kilograms of new tea from Enshi every year!

That's why for all of Enshi's enticing beauty, to me nothing is more precious and unforgettable than the kindness of my Enshi friend!

Jindian; a one-way ride takes less than half an hour.

Accommodation

Mt Wudang has a variety of accommodations, of which Mt Wudang special zone and Wuyaling have the most choices, offering not just hotels but also small guesthouses; there are less accommodations at Jinding so naturally the price is much higher; visitors to Wulonggong Palace, which is not yet open to the public, can only stay with farmer families.

Huazhong Hotel (719) 566 5548 Yongle Road, Mt Wudang special zone

Mt Wudang Power Hotel (719) 566 5440 Taihe Road, Mt Wudang special zone

Jiulong Guesthouse (719) 568 9176, 568 9288 Wuyaling carpark, Mt Wudang

Jinding VIP Reception Centre (719) 569 2571 Next to the Jinding cable car stop, Mt Wudang

Mt Wudang Guesthouse (719) 889 1899 No.5, Renmin Road South, Shiyan City

Shennong Peak

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: Tour Xuanyuemen, Yuxugong Palace, Yuxuyan, Yuzhengong Palace and other sights at the foot of the mountain, then visit Qiongtai. After lunch, take the cable car to Jinding and see sights including Jindian (the Golden Palace); along the way you can see the attractions on Tianzhufeng Peak; stay overnight at Wuyaling.

Day 2: Tour Nanyan and Zixiaogong Palace in the morning; lunch at Zixiaogong Palace before making way down the mountain; tour Tianjin Bridge, Taizipo, Mozhenjing (needle-grinding well) en-route.

Hongping Town

Admissions: To the mountain 110 yuan; Jinding 20 yuan; Zixiaogong Palace 15 yuan

Cable car prices:

Up 50 yuan, down 45 yuan, return 80 yuan

(for March to May, September, October)

Up 45 yuan, down 35 yuan, return 70 yuan

(for January, February, June to August, November, December)

Environmentally-friendly electrical trolley cars: return 70 yuan

Reminders:

1. Do not point at god images in Taoist monasteries; do not stand on the doorstep when entering; refrain from making loud noises.
2. 'Buddhists don't speak of names, Taoists don't speak of age'. Don't ask a Taoist about age or background.
3. There are many remote areas on Mt Wudang — don't enter without permission. Local guides are recommended.

Banzhangyan

Shennongjia

Long Distance Transport

1. From the capital city of Hubei Province, Wuhan, buses depart nightly for Xingshan from the long distance bus terminal on Xinhua Road at 8 pm, arriving the next morning at 6 am in Xingshan county; tickets cost 90 yuan. From Xingshan take the mini-bus to Shennongjia's Muyu Town (60 kilometres); hourly buses cost 10 yuan.
2. Long distance buses from Wuhan's Simenkou bus terminal to Shennongjia's town of Songbai; tickets cost 120 yuan; departure at 5 am, arrival at 5 pm in the afternoon.
3. Take the train from Wuhan to Shiyan (departs 10 pm and arrives at 6 am in Shiyan) , then take a taxi to the Shiyan bus station, where at 7:30 am buses leave for Shennongjia for midday arrival; Shiyan to Muyu is over 200 kilometres and takes 4.5 hours; tickets cost 45 yuan; this is the closest town to the centre of the Shennongjia nature reserve; one can tour Mt Wudang first, then visit Shennongjia.
4. Yichang to Muyu buses depart daily from 6 am and take around 7 hours; alternatively, take the bus from Yichang to Xingshan, a 140-kilometre journey that costs 35 yuan per ticket; buses depart every half-hour.

Departing from Shennongjia, you can either leave from Muyu town, where there are daily morning buses to Yichang or take the bus from Muyu town to Xingshan, tickets are 10 yuan; or set off from Songbai from where at 5 am each morning a bus leaves for Wuhan city, tickets are 120 yuan. Or, take a 6 am bus to Yichang that costs 45 yuan and arrives in 7 hours.

Scenic Area Transport

Shuttles serve the Shennongjia national park. Each morning before 7:30 am, buses depart from Muyu town and pass all the scenic areas. The limited number of buses makes travel inconvenient, so it's best to hire a mini-van that seats 5 at around 200~300 yuan / day; there are also tourist buses from Songbai to Muyu and other attractions.

Accommodation

Most visitors to Shennongjia choose to stay in Muyu Town, which has a good assortment of accommodation from which to choose. Two-star hotels charge 200~280 yuan / room; in the off-season the rate goes down to 120 yuan. Songbai Town, Muyu Town, and other towns along the way, such as Hongping, also offer decent accommodation with many rooms available under 80 yuan; especially small places on the hills near Muyu and Xiangxiyuan — near the tea plantations offer unbeatable tranquillity.

Shennongjia Guesthouse (719) 333 2355 No.39, Changqing Road, Songbai Town, Shennongjia Forest Park

Liuhou Guesthouse (719) 333 776 Songbai Town, Shennongjia Forest Park

Shennong Villa (719) 345 2285 No.1A, Muyu Town, Shennongjia Forest Park

Shennong Gong Guesthouse (719) 345 2879 Muyu Town, Shennongjia Forest Park

Shennong Resort (719) 345 2546 Muyu Town, Shennongjia Forest Park

Admissions

National Forest Park 60 yuan; National Natural Reserve 100 yuan; Shennongtan scenic area 40 yuan; Yemahe river rafting 125 yuan; Hualanggu (Picture Gallery Valley) 20 yuan; Shennongjia Ecological Museum 30 yuan; Tianshengqiao (Natural Bridge) Scenic Area 30 yuan; Xiangxiyuan 30 yuan

Tasty Treat

Shennongjia's top speciality is smoked meat — served at almost every restaurant; the local potatoes and 'lazy' tofu are worth trying as well. Another hit with visitors are the wild vegetables of Shennongjia; to get yourself fill of the local treats, have a Tujia banquet or a wild vegetables banquet à la Shennong.

Precautions

1. Shennongjia forests are primitive and many areas are undeveloped. Many tourists have become lost in the jungle, so hikers should use reliable local guides.
2. Jungle hiking requires a hat, long sleeves and pants with tight cuffs and boots to prevent bites by poisonous bugs or snakes.
3. If there are storms, first get your bearings, then find an open space to avoid being struck by lightning.

Penghu

China's Forgotten World Wonder

Photos by Dr. Engelbert Altenburger & Penghu County Government
Article by Dr. Engelbert Altenburger

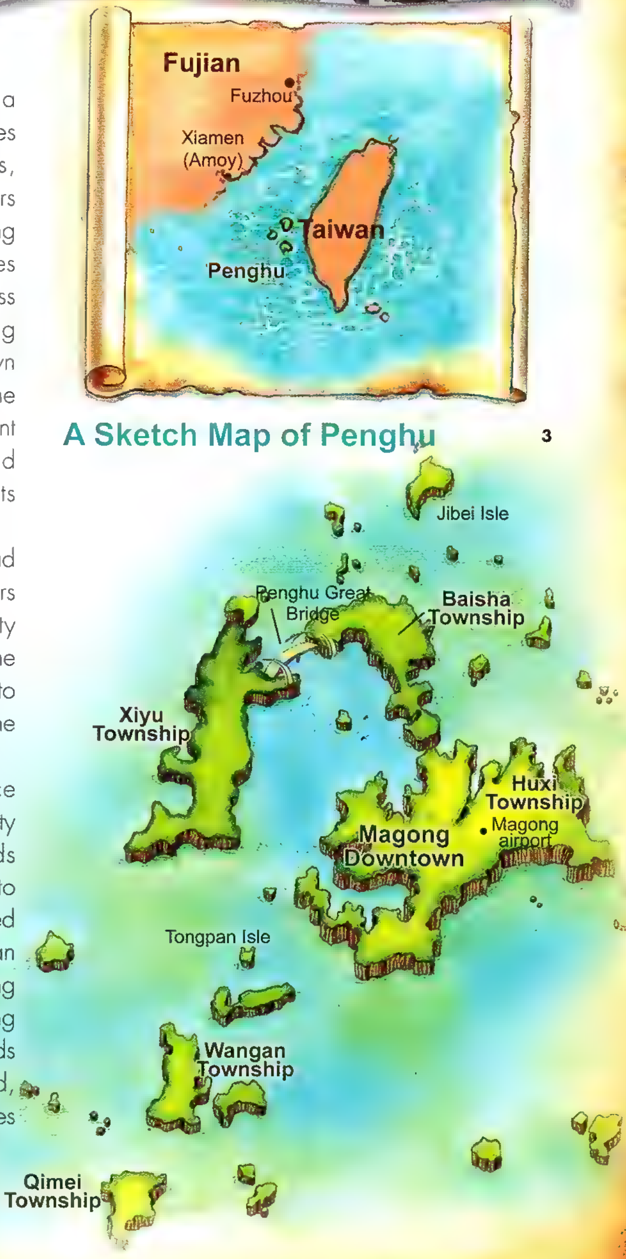
Penghu may not see a soon influx of tourists, but rather remain enshrouded in mystery. For those nature lovers who are eager to rediscover a forgotten world that can be truly called a wonder.

Magong Town in Mediterranean Look

Arriving by boat at the capital Magong after a 4-hour's drive from Gaoxiong (Kaohsiung) makes the best approach to Penghu. Like in Athens, about half of the over 90,000 Penghu islanders live in the largest town, where the typically strong salt-wind welcomes the visitors and soon invites him for a galloping ride by motor-scooter across Magong island and its two other neighboring islands of Baisha and Xiyu. While Magong town might inspire a somewhat Mediterranean air, the open fields outside the dispersed and tiny settlement points throw light on the harsh geographic and climate conditions that bedevil the land and its inhabitants.

How difficult was it to replant trees, which had become totally absent since the arrival of settlers during the times of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 — 1279)! How arduous was it to open the land for agriculture, which bare almost no soil on to the rocky underground — blown into the sea by the fierce winds! How could people stay there at all?

The secret, why migrants especially since the 17th century at the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368 — 1644) had used the Penghu islands as a stepping stone on their way from Fujian to Taiwan, lied in the affluence of fish in rock flushed waters. Where the tributaries of two strong ocean currents meet — the dark, warm Kuroshio flowing northward and the cold Oyashio counter moving from arctic waters. And where awe inspiring islands emerge as giant fortresses out of an enchanted, unsuspected smooth sea, brave the threats of waves and winds.


Fujian
Fuzhou
Xiamen (Amoy)
Taiwan
Penghu
A Sketch Map of Penghu
3
Jibei Isle
Penghu Great Bridge
Baisha Township
Xiyu Township
Huxi Township
Magong airport
Magong Downtown
Tongpan Isle
Wangan Township
Qimei Township

1. Penghu Tongpan isle.
2. Chixi isle's basalt pillars.
3. A sketch map of the Penghu archipelago (Penghu County Government, 2005)

Basalt Rock Formed Penghu

Basalt rock castles piled up heaps of columns, unwavering volcanic cliffs, all of them revealed as iron-tough tufts of sea monsters. Shields of rock are ready to fight a war against times and destructive forces. Baton keeps off intruders; pencils of unknown writers documented the birth of Taiwan.

Plain landscapes, covered with orange green meadows on their barren ground, decorated with Indian Blanket flowers, agave and cacti, make the rest of the scenery — flat islands as a result of original flows of basalt layers. More than 5 million years ago the emergence of Taiwan's main island, the Eurasian continent began to break up on its southeastern end, and before diving down under the Pacific Ocean plate, magma already had begun to creep through the cracks of the earth crust forming undersea pancake plateaus. Thickly structured, fine grained, dark — mysterious and martial as signified by basalt. The formation of Penghu was therefore no spectacular volcanic outbreak, as would happen later with the other outlying islands east of Taiwan (Green Island and Lanyu). Penghu was the announcement of the succeeding birth of Taiwan's main island.

The islands left are now the rest of a million years long erosion process and the 'lucky top' of an extended basalt scenery which has been submerged by rising sea waters since the past 10,000 years. Their highest point is 79 m above sea level on the Greater Cat Island to the southwest, a wildlife refuge for gulls and other birds. The nearest island to Magong, impressing with typical basalt pillars, is Tongpan (literally means 'kettle-dish isle'), which from the air looks more like a horseshoe crab, thwarting with a gallery of cliffs on its southern coast that reminds of magic pencil sticks. Even more thrilling is Qimei, the 'Isle of Seven Belles' at the southern tip of the archipelago. A treasure island is where freshly congealing lava flows seem to be about to contract into hexagonal tubes and pillars as though they were terrified by their sight of the light of the world. At some corner, the rest of a flat coast has been eroded to a form that looks like a mini-map of Taiwan's main island; and at another corner fishermen had created a unique stone weir. It traps fish, but its twin heart shape makes it a special romantic place. Further volcano highlights are found in the cliffs of some other isles, such as Chixi on West Isle (Xiyu), or Jishan isle, Bird isle and mighty Dinggou isle to the northeast.

Seashore Scenery

A sharp contrast is given by some blazing beaches. They are composed of corals, shells and radiolarians and found on Jibei isle to the north and its neighboring islets of Mudou and Xianjiao, where

1. The wealth of Penghu: a fresh catch of silver anchovies.

2. Zhongshe village, residence of family Zeng on Wang'an island.

3. Qimei isle (Isle of Seven Belles): 'Little Taiwan' – outstanding erosion form on the basalt coast

4. Qimei isle (Isle of Seven Belles): a most unusual fishtrap: the double heart stone weir on the northeast coast.

bathers and snorkellers find a tropical paradise. But Penghu offers even more — the wealth of seafood from pristine waters which ranges from anchovies to abalone shellfish, squids and crabs, which either caught from the sea or harvested from floating fish farms. The basalt coast offers sea weed and the thin soils provide the utmost what nature might offer to hard working farmers. Peanuts, hami melons, sponge cucumbers — all fruits that defy dryness due to little rain (just less than 1000 mm / year), high evaporation (average 1800 mm / year) and salinisation. However, they would have hardly a chance to grow, if man had not protected them in small fields surrounded by high coral stone walls which give a special feature to the landscape (vegetable tenant fields).

Thus people have been traditionally dependent on the rich diverse marine life. Arriving across the sea they were seeking protection from Mazu, a historic young lady of the 10th century with spiritual powers, who since then has been venerated as a *Bodhisattva* (goddess and protectress) of all seafarers. Migrants from Fujian to Penghu and Taiwan have brought her statue with them and constructed their houses around a Mazu-temple. The first one built in 1604 has also left its name for the anchor site once named Magong Cove, a place name that was deprived by its original meaning in 1921, when Japanese authorities replaced the character the less warmhearted meaning of 'horse' with a homonym of the honorable 'Mother'. Nonetheless have the Penghu islanders been faithful to their Fukienese believes and traditions, as they may count today more than 200 temples, an amount equivalent to that of the different species of birds. Penghu has not only become an interstation for settlers seeking a new homeland on Taiwan, but also a paradise for migratory birds. Or for artists and all those nature lovers who are eager to rediscover a forgotten world that can be truly called a wonder.

3

Travel Tips

Transportation: daily scheduled flights to Magong, Penghu from Taipei, Taichung, Chiayi, Tainan and Kaohsiung. Ticket fare is around NTD1,350~1,700.

Scheduled daily boat connection from Kaohsiung and Chimei, which takes about 4 hours. Tickets cost NTD600~1,300 (one-way); NTD1,080~2,340 (round-trip).

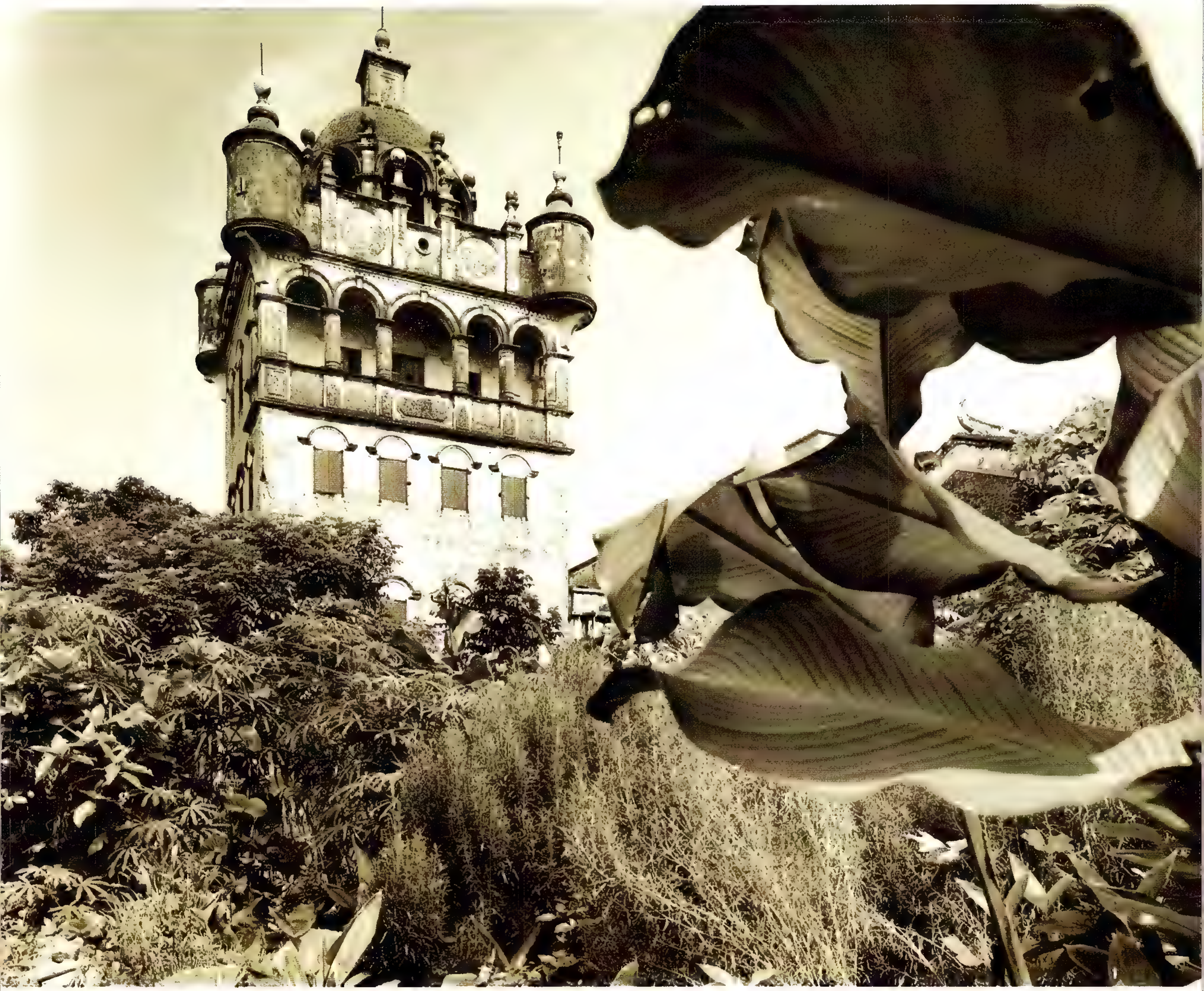
Penghu Count Government

Tel: (06) 927 4400 Website: www.penghu.gov.tw

Beauty Of The Past

Black-and-white Photography of Kaiping Watchtowers

Photos & Article by Chan Yat Nin



About a year ago, my colleague and I were excited about the news that the Kaiping watchtowers and the village were ratifed on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list. Although *China Tourism* had already had coverage of these watchtowers, I could not get them off my mind and eagerly hoped to photograph them myself. Taking six cameras of different formats, I set off to Kaiping in southeast China's Guangdong Province.

Kaiping Watch Towers Reviving My B&W Photography

Of several thousand original watchtower houses in Kaiping, 1,833 still stand, towering over almost every village. They are the type of architecture which integrates the Western and Chinese artistic elements well, making them a rare wonder in the world. Although the passage of time has left traces on them, it also adds touches of life to them, making them a unique historical art that cannot be reproduced. They touch me so deeply.

I spent my holiday breaks photographing Kaiping watchtowers using colour film the first time, both colour and black-and-white film the second time, and simply B&W for the third and fourth time. As a matter of fact, I had dismissed B&W photography during my photography career. But these watchtowers brought it back to my mind. Their weather-beaten worn-out walls give distinct colour layers of black, grey and white. Instinct told me that the B&W images would better demonstrate this type of architecture, making the buildings look more solid and magnificent, as well as better reflect their rich history.

Traditional B&W Photography's Appeal

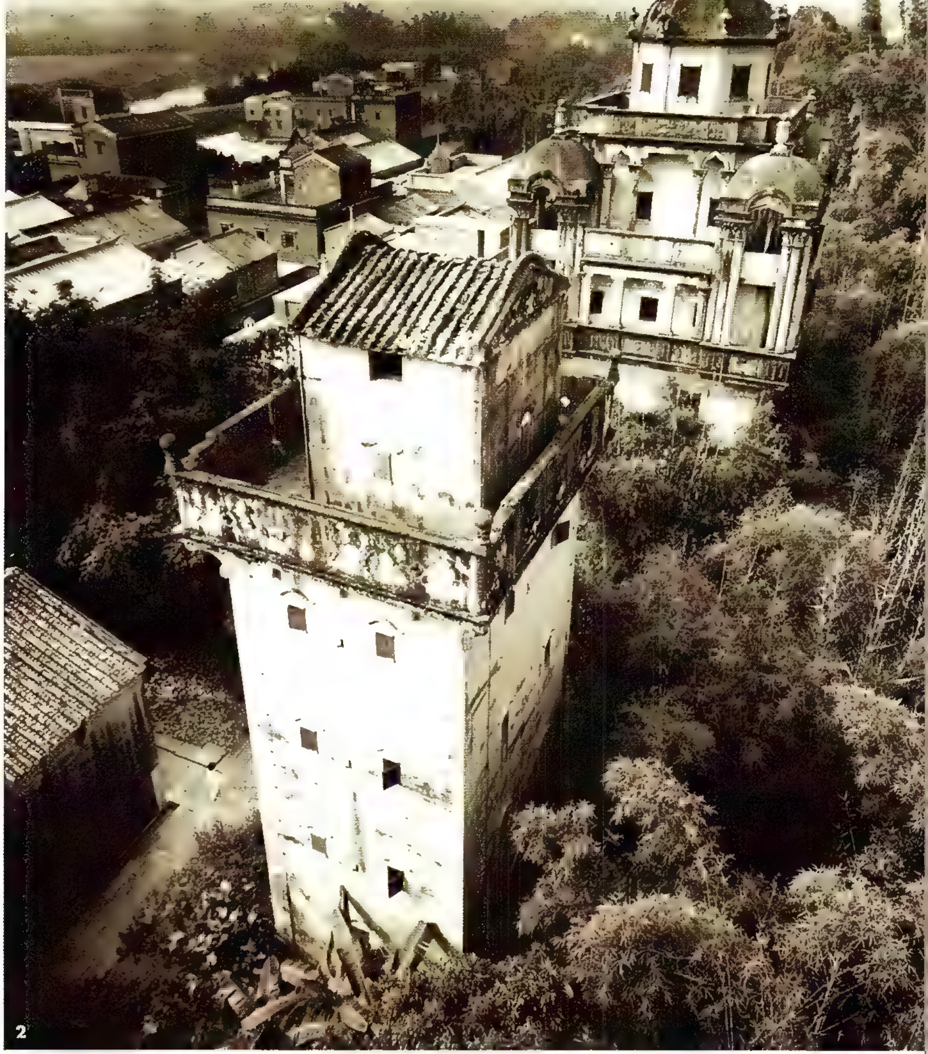
B&W photography takes two forms: The first refers to the photos taken with traditional B&W films and developed in the traditional way; and the other refers to B&W photos produced by digital technology.

The B&W digital images again can be

Shilu at Xiabian Village Shot in the Morning 1
Using 4 x 5 inch camera, 90mm lens (equal to the 25mm lens for the 135 camera) with orange filter; Tmax ISO 100 B&W film, 1/8 second, and aperture 16~22.

Jinjiang Tower and Shengfeng Tower at Jinjiangli 2
Shot from the 7th floor of the Ruishi Tower in the afternoon.
Using 6 x 6 cm camera, 38mm lens (equal to 21mm lens for the 135 camera) with yellow filter, Neopan ISO 100 B&W film, 1/60 second, and aperture 8.

Yiyun Tower at Datongli Shot in the Afternoon 3
Using 4 x 5 inch camera, 150mm lens (equal to 43mm lens for the 135 camera) with orange filter, Tmax ISO 100 B&W film, 1/8 seconds, and aperture 16.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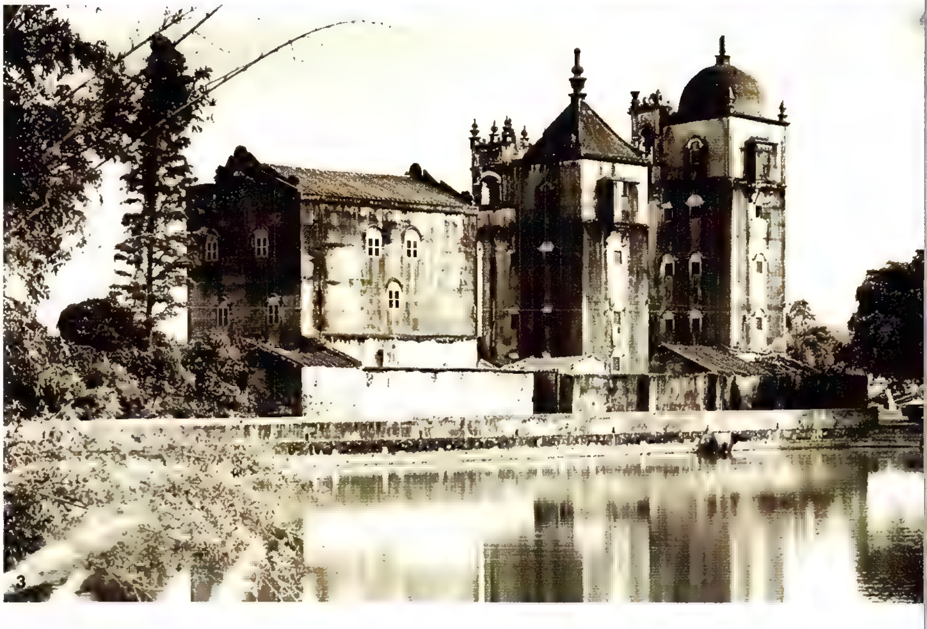
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classified into two types: the first type includes those pictures taken with a digital camera using its B&W setting as well as the B&W pictures converted from colour digital images through computer software. The other type refers to the digital B&W images converted from traditional film-based ones by a scanner. No matter what the original film is, colour or B&W, a scanner can turn the images into black and white.

It's indisputable that digital technology has given photography magic powers, and digital photography has gone mainstream. Fewer people use traditional film to take pictures nowadays, let alone the traditional B&W photography. But to me, the traditional B&W photography has an appeal that other forms of photography are unable to achieve. It's declining just because nowadays people prefer doing things in a more convenient and easy way. However it is digital photography's versatility that highlights the credibility and uniqueness of the traditional B&W photography.

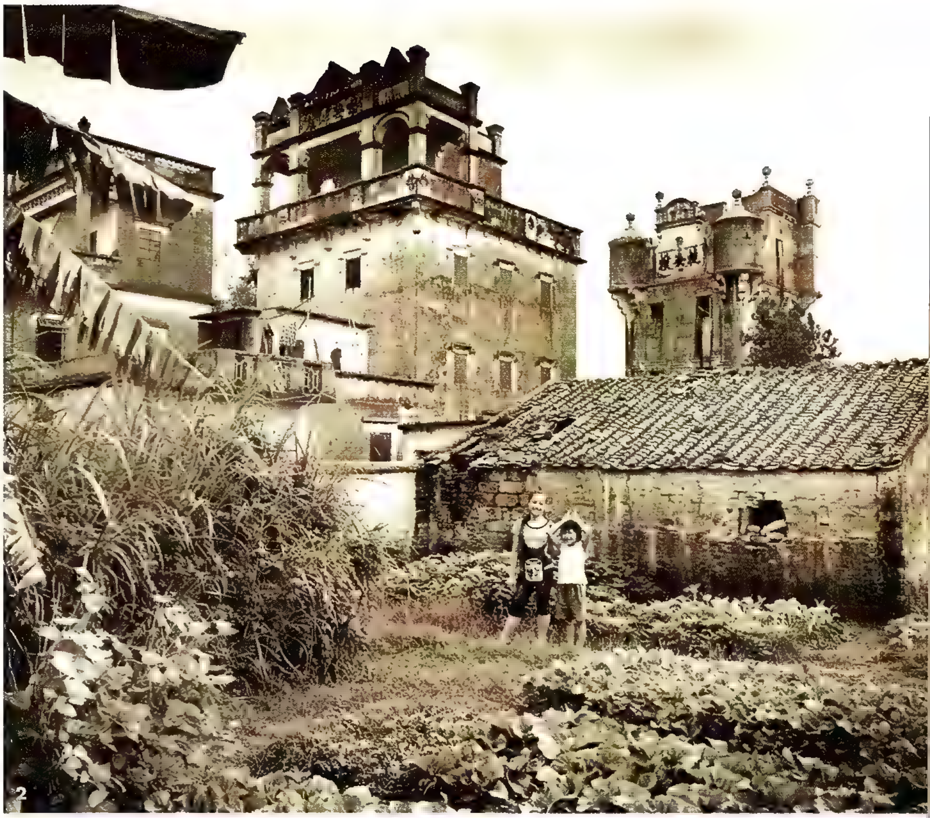
Equipment for Shooting Watchtowers

The main camera I used for photographing Kaiping watchtowers is the 4 x 5 inch large format camera because large format images have higher quality and can meticulously depict the historical traces on these watchtowers. This kind of camera also has an axis adjustment device to minimise perspective distortion when photographing buildings. I also used two medium format cameras, 6 x 9 cm and 6 x 6cm respectively. The 120 format proves to be easier and quicker to use than the large format, and the image quality is also pretty good. In addition, I equipped myself with two 35mm film format cameras because they are flexible when photographing human activities. Sometimes I would use one of them to shoot colour reversals.

A wide-angle lens is the most common equipment for photographing watchtowers. I often use 16~35mm zoom lens for a 135 camera, 58mm and 38mm lens for a 120 camera, and 65mm, 90mm and 150mm lens for a 4 x 5 inch camera.

A yellow or orange or even a red filter must be used when photographing watchtowers on B&W film. This type of warm colour filter can help darken the blue sky to reveal white clouds and therefore give prominence to the watchtower. The yellow filter can also help brighten the green plants. But they require exposure compensation: yellow filter by +1, orange filter by +2, and red filter by +3.

Translated by Karen Chen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'Ghost Village' — Dengbian Village 1

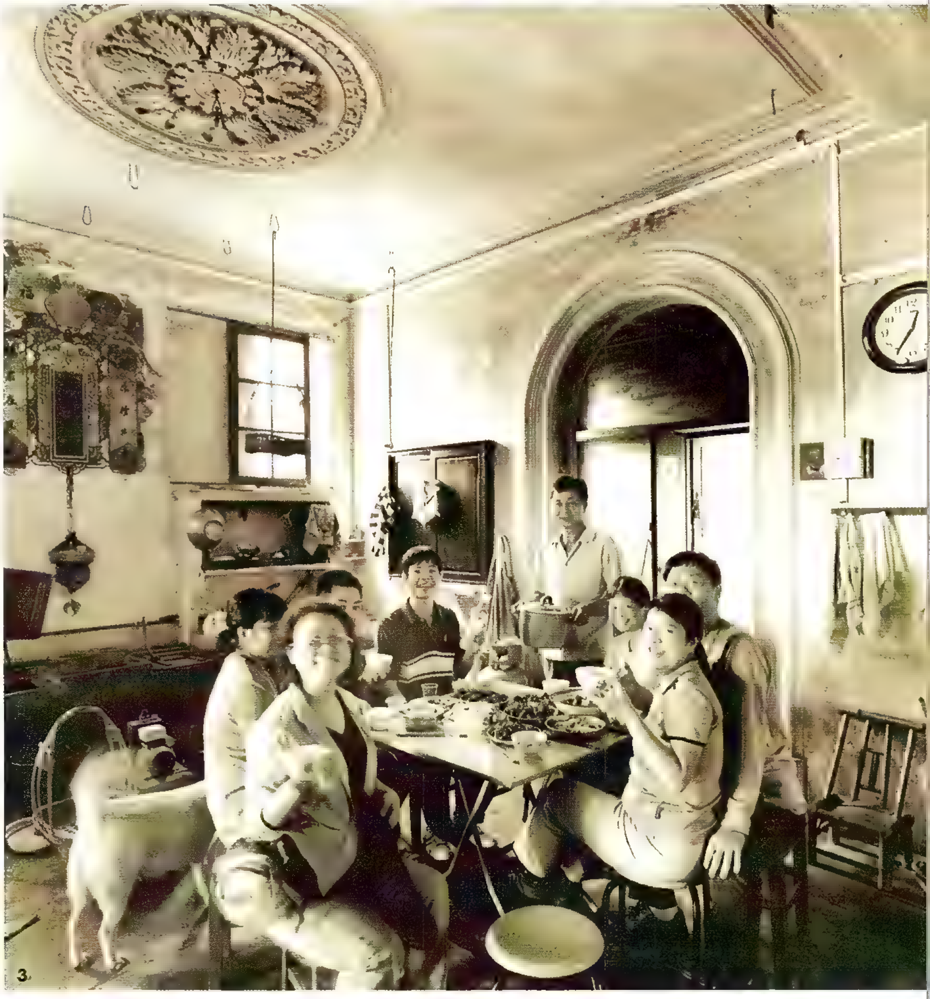
Shot between 3 pm and 4 pm using a slow shutter speed while the models were walking to create an eerie atmosphere and produce an illusion.
Using 4 x 5 inch camera, 65mm lens (equal to 18mm lens for the 135 camera) with central grey filter, Tmax ISO 100 B&W film, 1 second, and aperture 16.

Jie'an Tower at Qingmin Village 2

Shot under an overcast sky. The inclusion of two girls in the picture adds vitality and life to the still image.
Using 6 x 9 cm camera, 58mm lens with yellow filter, Tmax ISO 400 B&W film, 1/60 seconds, and aperture 11.

Rural Family Lunch 3

Shot at Junhe Village. Although dimly lit, the old building still looks sumptuously furnished. Because of the slow shutter speed, the image of some people in motion become virtual and not very clear, but the picture as a whole looks more vivid and true to life. Using 6 x 6 cm camera, 38mm lens, ILFord ISO 100 B&W film, 1 second, and aperture 5.6~8.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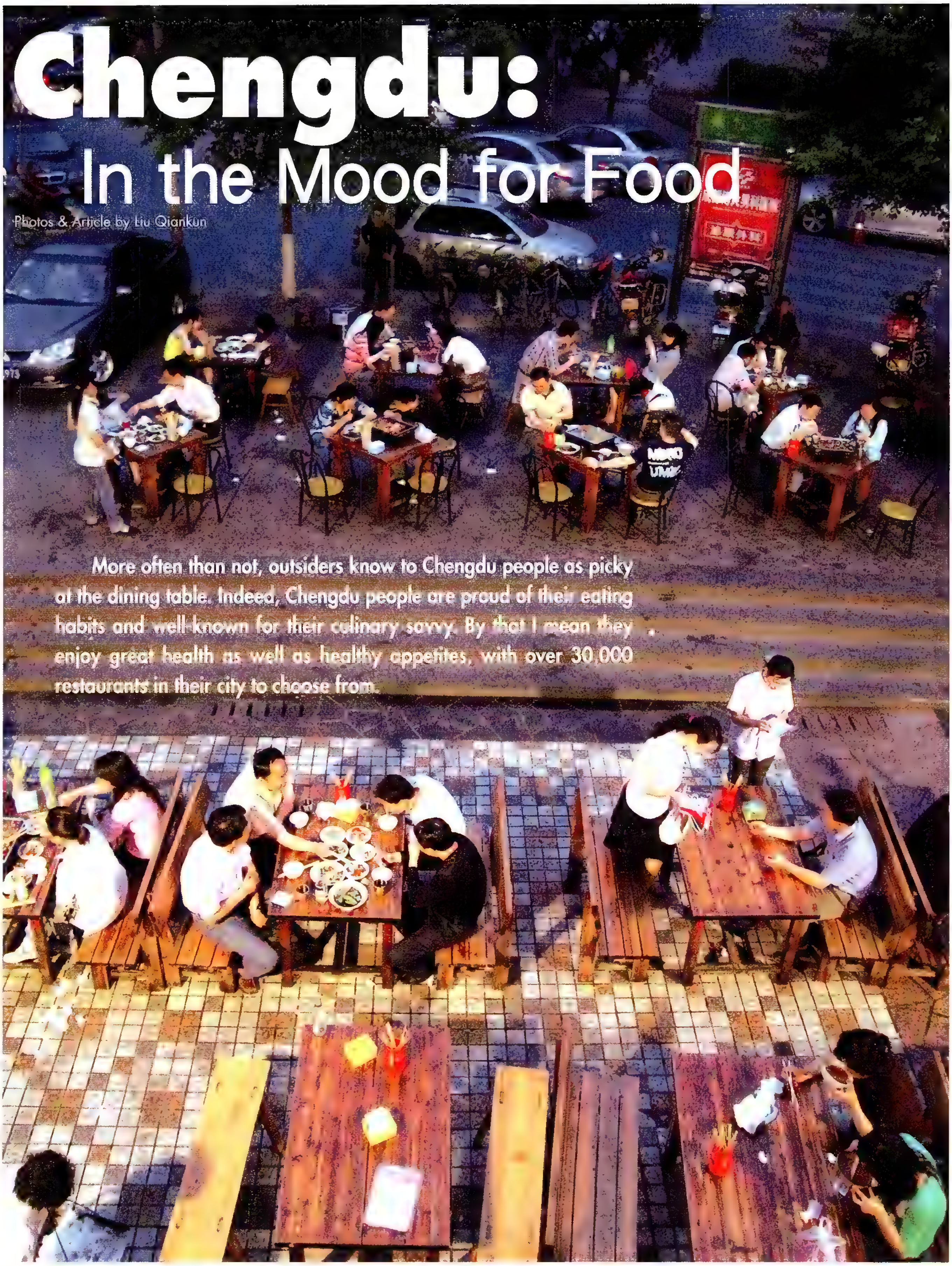


Chengdu:

In the Mood for Food

Photos & Article by Liu Qiankun

More often than not, outsiders know to Chengdu people as picky at the dining table. Indeed, Chengdu people are proud of their eating habits and well-known for their culinary savvy. By that I mean they enjoy great health as well as healthy appetites, with over 30,000 restaurants in their city to choose from.

Traditional Hot Pot

The famous Sichuan hot pot originated from Chongqing's beef stomach and intestine hot pot. In its earliest form, it was a snack food sold by a street hawker carrying a shoulder pole. In the Republic period (1912—1949), it was sold from shops in Chongqing City. Later on, it became a favourite fast food of the boat trackers. It diversified gradually and became a more up-market way of eating. After it is spread to Chengdu, it was absorbed into the diet of Chengdu people, transforming into a different style of hot pot. Roughly, hot pot Chongqing-style is straightforward — spicy, numbing and punchy, while hot pot Chengdu-style is gentle-mild and fresh.

Concerning the level of spiciness, the restaurants offer mild, medium and very spicy soup with red chilli oil. When serving the dipping sauces, the waitress will ask how spicy you would like it. If you are spice-immune, she will scoop pure soup from the bottom of the hot pot into the dipping dishes. The soup base is strong in taste and yet free of red oil. Controlling the level of spiciness has a lot to do with the scooping skill of the waitress. For a spice lover, she will skim a lot of red oil into the dish.

Chongqing Hot Pot with Sour Radish and Fish Head（重庆酸萝卜鱼头火锅）
Address: No. 11, Xinhong Road South, Chenghua District Tel.: (28) 8431 4785

Pengzhou Jiuchi Echang Hot Pot（彭州九尺鹅肠火锅）
Address: No. 58, Jule Road Tel.: (28) 8705 1542

Cold Pot Fish

Hot pot is highly popular all over China. It is almost a daily necessity for the beautiful girls of Chengdu. They would have a hot pot feast every couple of days. In the restaurants, while complaining about the smell of the hot pot, they keep gulping boiled beef stomach and duck intestines. To address the smell problem, the proprietor altered the way of serving. He prepared the hot pot food in the kitchen before it was served. Cold pot fish features cold pot and steaming hot fish. It becomes a 'hot' dish in town.

The way of serving 'fragrant and spicy crab' is similar to that of cold pot fish. After the main ingredient, crab, is finished, gourmets can still pour in other ingredients vegetables or meat into the boiling soup.

Sanzhi'e Restaurant（三只耳）
Address: No. 10, Nijiaqiao Road,
Wuhou District
Tel.: (28) 8553 0188

Pickle Sichuan-Style

Sichuan pickle is tasty and well-known nationwide. The traditional preserved leafy vegetables and radish cannot satisfy the choosey tongue of the Sichuan people. They offer a much larger variety — lettuce, bamboo shoot, ginger, onion, kelp, gongcai (a kind of lettuce). To top all that, they invented the meat pickle, for example, pig's ear and chicken claws.

Yulin Crayfish

Yulin Crayfish an increasingly popular snack in Chengdu, is cooked to order, comes at a fair price and is made with fresh goods. Business is great with long queues every day. As it is near two famous pubs, White Night and Tavern, many of its customers would order take-out of crayfish and field snail to be delivered to the pubs.

Seafood Barbeque

Chengdu absorbs everything tasty. A young man from Guangdong Province named A Lang took the lead in barbequing seafood on flaming charcoal in Kuanxiangzi. After a few years, barbequed seafood became a major evening snack food, second only to cold dish in Chengdu. Business is so good that only early-comers are served. Clam, mini clam, and razor clam are wrapped in tinfoil and roasted. Stocks of clams run out quickly, but the rice noodles fried with the clams tastes even better. Mussel and scallop are barbequed directly on charcoal. Gourmets tear the squid roasted to a brownish crust into long pieces and chew them slowly. The unique savoury taste of the snack lingers.

Like seafood, fish caught in the rivers can also be barbequed. In the past two years, the most well-known, Ziwei Barbequed Fish has opened a few branches in Chengdu.

A Lang Barbeque（阿狼烧烤）
Address: Kuanxiangzi, Chengdu
Tel.: (86) 132 5815 3128

Jinhansi South American Barbeque（金汉斯南美烧烤）
Address: Room 1A Gaoshu Building (in the intersection of Shuangnan Road), West Section, 2nd Ring Road, Wuhou District
Tel.: (28) 8526 2728

Penpenxia Pot Shrimp

On seeing penpenxia (literally 'pot pot shrimp'), outsiders may have the misunderstanding that Chengdu people have big appetites. They eat shrimps pot by pot. In fact, the pot has something to do with the way of cooking. Chengdu people love to cook shrimps in soup, and pots are good for serving soup. Penpenxia comes in four flavours-extra spicy, medium spicy, mild spicy and fish fragrant.

Huangcheng Laoma Restaurant（皇城老妈）
Address: No. 20, South 3rd Section, 2nd Ring Road, Wuhou District
Tel.: (28) 8513 9999
*Also available around Qingjiang Road east and Shihui Street.

Xiaotan Tofu Pudding

Though Xiaotan tofu pudding is not as well-known as longchaoshou wonton and zhongshuijiao dumpling, the tofu here is extremely tender, and the condiments intensify the flavour by a grade or two. In particular, once the iced tofu pudding touches the tongue, it feels like it is melting. Xiaotan Tofu Pudding is a shop with a long history. It also serves steamed beef in small baskets, offering the senses a savoury, spicy, and numbing sensation. The usually tough beef is tender and fleshy.

Xiaotan Tofu Pudding（小谭豆花）
Address: No. 13 of No. 86, Xida Street Tel.: (28) 8625 2753

Tianfu Tofu Pudding Shop（天府豆花庄）
Address: Dongchenggen Road, Central District
*The tofu pudding served comes in many varieties. The taste is great, and the price is affordable.

Douhuafan Tofu Pudding Shop（豆花饭）
Address: Qidaoyan Street, Gaoshengqiao
* Tofu pudding with preserved pickle at 3.5 yuan and tofu pudding with meat at 5.5 yuan.

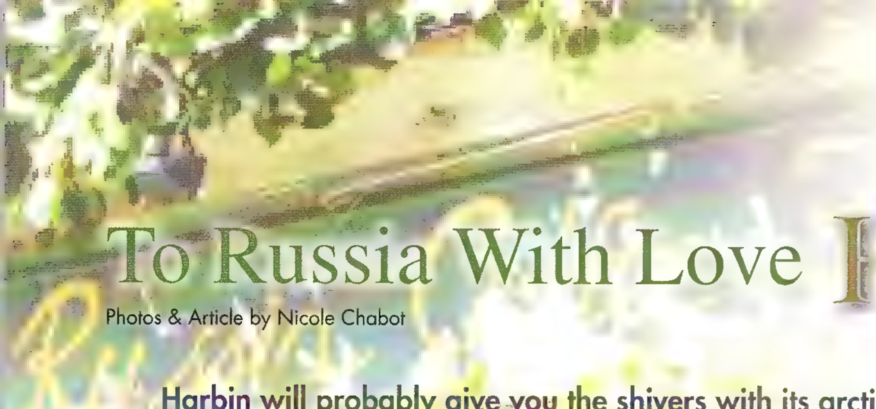
Chuanchuanxiang Kebab

If a visitor to Chengdu has not tried the Chengdu-style kebabs, he has missed one of the city's core experiences. Chuanchuanxiang, literally 'string string savoury', is a kebab of sliced meat and vegetables on bamboo skewers, boiled in bubbling water (not roasted) and served in two to three minutes. Dipped in sesame oil or dried chilli, chuanchuanxiang tastes head-shakingly yummy, steaming hot and sweat-inducingly spicy. You will sweat on the face, have tears in your eyes and soon your nose will be running. For that reason, Chuanchuanxiang is alternatively called 'malatang' (literally numb, spicy and hot) or small hot pot.

Wangmei Chuanchuanxiang Kebab（王梅串串香）
Address: No. 40, Fuxing Street (in the rear of Wangfujing Department Store)
Tel.: (28) 8967 6188

Yuan's Chuanchuanxiang Kebab（袁记串串香）
Address: No. 13, Hongmiaozi Street, Taisheng Street South, Qingyang District
Tel.: (28) 8676 2298
*In fact, chuanchuanxiang is available everywhere in town. It is most famous in Huaxing Street. A lover of spicy and numbing food can search for this treat in Rongfang Street in downtown Chengdu.

Translated by Zhang Boli



To Russia With Love Harbin

Photos & Article by Nicole Chabot

Harbin will probably give you the shivers with its arctic temperatures and festival celebrating the beauty of snow and ice. Yet, as the verdant onion dome St. Sofia's Church attests, Harbin is a valentine to Russia that is worth visiting whatever the season.

The name Harbin means 'place for drying nets' in Manchu, the now almost extinct language of Manchuria, today's northeastern China, and relates to Harbin's fishing village past. Yet, the city on the southern bank of the Songhua River is more commonly known as the 'Moscow of the Orient' or 'St. Petersburg of the Orient', due to its once sizable Russian community and the architectural footprints it left behind.

Zhong Yang Street, also known as Central Street and Kitaisaka Street is the most complete example of the foreign bodies who called Harbin home. The pedestrianised thoroughfare is packed with Baroque and Byzantine style buildings. Nestled alongside aromatic Russian bakeries are Jewish businesses, Japanese eateries, and the all too common American fast food restaurants.

The Russian Village on Sun Island is another Russian-centric spot. It used to be the resort playground of the Russians in the 1930s. Today, it is still a peaceful haven where visitors happen upon the original wooden villas inhabited by the Russians and outfitted in the furnishings of the times. Couples stroll hand in arm along wide, tree lined avenues, families pedal by on bicycles built for three, and children gape at middle aged Russian ladies in traditional garb.

Russian dancers

Buildin

Eating borscht, known locally as Red soup, Russian sausage, caviar, and such other palate pleasing items, as do the Russians is another way of experiencing yesteryear. Borscht travelled southward from Harbin down to Shanghai becoming a thick 'village' soup and then on to Hong Kong as a 'Russian' soup in step with the migration of Russian Jews from Harbin to Shanghai in the 1920s and 30s and from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Both versions of the soup have been Shanghaied and Hong Kong-ified and have become popular local soups in their own right. Yet, Harbin was the first stop on the dish's eastern journey.

One place to tuck a napkin under your chin is the Russian Cafe. With its frilly decor, upright piano, and other decorative flourishes, it bears strong resemblance to what a Russian grandmother's sitting room might look like. Its culinary offering is limited though dependable and the interior makes up for the lack of surprises on the menu. In contrast with the Russia of the past that the Russian Cafe exemplifies, the Around the World restaurant represents the Russia of today. This roomy Russian owned restaurant over two floors has differently themed private rooms to suit your every whim. Yet, siphon yourself off from the main dining room and you miss the floorshow in which garishly dressed Russian dancers twirl and raise their legs and a singer gives her larynx a workout; bodice clad waitresses deliver dishes to your table. This type of vaudeville is one face of Russia in China. It's not for the weak of heart. The Russian Village Park, a strip of neon lit eateries, with no greenery in sight, provides a cornucopia of dinner options of the watery-view-and-terrace variety. The food runs the gauntlet of the really bad to the really great.

Harbin is the largest city in north east Asia, of the Russian Far East including Siberia, and has the potential to become the urban services centre for Asian residents of the Russian Federation. Russians have flocked to Heihe, another smaller border city in the province, and Harbin, and via the latter their journey on to Hainan for sun-bathing; and on to Shanghai and Hong Kong for shopping. Assuming that the ratio of the fair to black haired ascends, new markers of Russia in Harbin will be celebrated by the travellers of tomorrow.

Russian grandmother's sitting room

China Tourism Index 2007 (Issues 307~312)

* Feature Story

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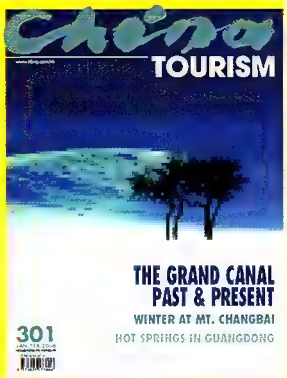
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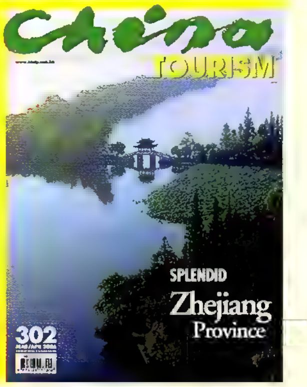
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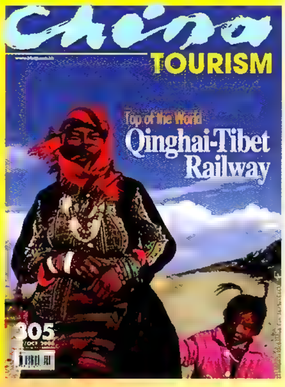
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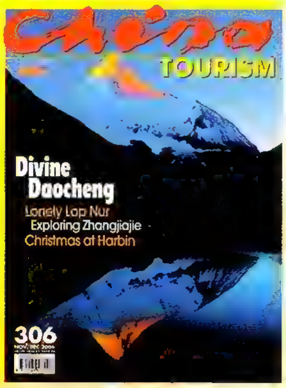
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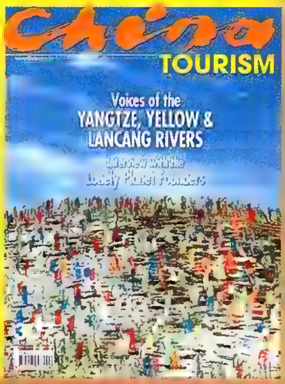
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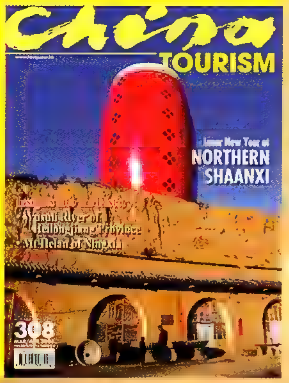
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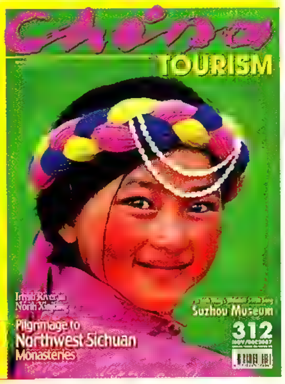
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Our readers' ideas and opinions are important to us. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine. Thank you!

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7. What information or topics you would like *China Tourism* to cover in the future?

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NEXT ISSUE

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FEATURE STORY

South-eastern Guizhou
An Original Ecology Stage

Here, Qiandongnan Miao & Dong Autonomous Prefecture of Guizhou Province is a place full of passion and romance. In the areas of 30,000 square kilometres are the soulful flower bridges, magnificent drum towers, splendid costumes and colourful festivals. The Original Ethnic Art & Culture Festival in Kaili has become parts of the Chinese ethnic folklore tour. The festival not only displayed the prefecture's uniqueness, but also blending the splendid culture into beautiful scenery. The more layers of fabric in the skirt, the more beautiful it is. It is surely an area for original ethnic culture protection and exploration, and the universal original culture travel destination.

On the Way

Shandong — Ready for the Olympic

Early in the 1920s, Qingdao (or Tsingtao) in Shangdong Province became a famous tourist city and a summer resort. Qingdao has both beautiful scenery and a pleasant climate. The 2008 Olympics has chosen Fushan Bay in this city to host the sailing games. By June, all the Olympic-related construction will be completed meeting the Olympic sailing requirements, and pre-Olympic sailing games will also be held here. A tour to Shangdong would be a good choice for those want to escape from the overcrowded Beijing. Are you ready now?

Historical Echoes

Tibet Through the Lenses of Father and Son Photographers

Tibet is no longer a mysterious place today. However, you can't imagine there how the first photographer more than half a century ago recorded the lives of nobles and commoners, and the religious activities in Tibet in the early and mid 20th century. The father and son photographers, Denzin Gyaco, the 10th Demu Living Buddha, and his second son Demu Wangjug Doje, illustrate the changes of Tibet, especially the development of the Autonomous Region over the past 40 years.

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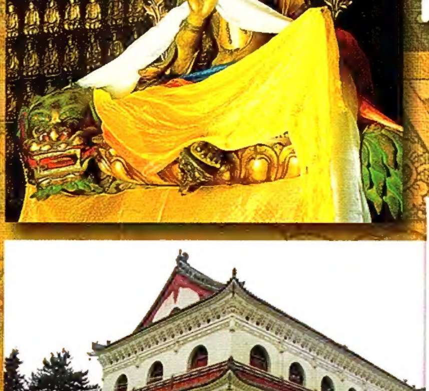
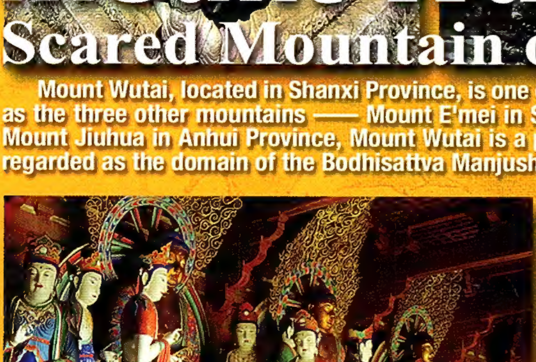


Mount Wutai, Shanxi
Scared Mountain of the Buddhists

Mount Wutai, located in Shanxi Province, is one of the four scared mountains of China. Ranking the same as the three other mountains —— Mount E'mei in Sichuan Province, Mount Putuo in Zhejiang Province and Mount Jiuhua in Anhui Province, Mount Wutai is a popular pilgrimage destination for Buddhists. It is highly regarded as the domain of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, an emanation of wisdom.



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